Effects of interpretive nutrition labels on consumer food purchases: the Starlight randomised controlled trial

Prof Cliona Ni Mhurchu, on behalf of DIET Starlight team
Interpretive FOP nutrition labels are a common policy recommendation.
# Traffic Light Labels (TLL)

![Traffic Light Labels Image](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All measures per 100g</th>
<th>LOW - a healthier choice</th>
<th>MEDIUM - most of the time</th>
<th>HIGH - eat occasionally</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sugars</td>
<td>5g or less</td>
<td>5.1g - 15g</td>
<td>More than 15g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fat</td>
<td>3g or less</td>
<td>3.1g - 20g</td>
<td>More than 20g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturates</td>
<td>1.5g or less</td>
<td>1.6g - 5g</td>
<td>More than 5g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt</td>
<td>0.3g or less</td>
<td>0.31g - 1.5g</td>
<td>More than 1.5g</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Health Star Rating (HSR) label

The more stars, the healthier.
Starlight RCT

What effects do interpretive nutrition labels have on the healthiness (FSANZ nutrient profiling scoring criterion – NPSC) of consumer food purchases?
Study design

Registration and 1-week run-in

Randomisation

HSR

TLL

NIP

1-month follow-up of all packaged food purchases
Intervention delivery
Consent & baseline data collection

FOOD LABEL TRIAL
Your involvement will help us to provide better food health information for everyone NZ
Thank You

Consent
I confirm that I have not used the FoodSwitch application before and that it is not currently installed on my smartphone. I will not install the application for the duration of the study.
I understand all of the above and agree to take part in the study
I agree to the Terms & Conditions for use of the Study Application.
Terms & Conditions
I wish to receive a copy of the results (if you leave this unchecked, the results will not be sent to you).
I agree to take part in a sub-study looking in more detail at my use of the smartphone application

Initial Survey
Date of Birth
Your gender:
- Male
- Female
- New Zealand
- European
- Maori
- Name/s of your iwi (tribe or tribes)
- Samoan
- Cook Island
- Maori
- Tongan
- Niuean
- Chinese
- Indian
- Other
- Please state

Volkova et al, JMIR mHealth uHealth 2016
Food purchasing data collection

Starlight study team
National Institute for Health Innovation
University of Auckland

Volkova et al, JMI Ro mHealth uHealth 2016
Healthiness of food purchases

Self-reported label usefulness (TLL and HSR compared to NIP)

- Participants randomised to HSR and TLL significantly more likely to report that they found the assigned labels *useful*; *easy* to understand; *bought different foods* as a result of viewing the labels; and their nutrition *knowledge* improved as a result of using the labels in the app (all p-values <0.001)

- No difference between TLL and HSR groups (all p-values >0.05)
Strengths and weaknesses

Strengths
• Randomised, blinded, controlled, large, real-world setting

Weaknesses
• Limited use of intervention, use of app as surrogate for on-pack labelling, incomplete reporting of purchases
Take home messages

- At the relatively low level of use observed in this RCT, interpretive front-of-pack nutrition labels had no significant effect on population food purchases.

- However shoppers find interpretive labels more useful and easier to understand than non-interpretive labels (NIP).

- Amongst a small subgroup of frequent label users, interpretive labels may assist in making healthier food choices.