FDA adding confusion with added sugars label

By ACSH Staff — August 18, 2015

Nutrition experts acknowledge that when it comes to the human body, there is no difference between sugar naturally found in foods and that which is added by manufacturers. That is, the body metabolizes sugar from colas the same way it does sugar from orange juice (yes, even organic orange juice). So why add a line to the Nutrition Facts label that specifically cites the amount of added sugars? There’s no good reason that we can see, but that’s what the FDA plans to do.

One might think that such a government agency, tasked with providing useful information to consumers, would only take such a step based on solid data that it would help consumers make better food choices. But would it? Not according to the Washington Legal Foundation [1] (WLF), which points out that a similar Canadian governmental agency (Health Canada or HC) has decided NOT to have a separate entry on their food labels for added sugars.

Among other issues, the WLF points out that HC, in addition to the scientific consensus about the body’s handling of sugars, also relied on public surveys indicating that an added sugars line on the food label would confuse rather than help consumers. In contrast, the FDA is using the Dietary Guidelines committee report, and their own study. Further, in its proposal set out in March 2014, the FDA declined to set a Daily Value (DV) for added sugars; now it wants to set a limit of 10 percent of total calories. While it may be possible for institutions to follow such guidance when designing food for many people, it’s unlikely that most consumers will be able to do so.

Dr. Ruth Kava, ACSH senior nutrition fellow, had this comment: It makes no nutritional sense to specify the amount of added sugar in a food. If it’s important for someone’s health to monitor sugar intake (as it would be for a diabetic person might be advised to do) then total sugar is the key ingredient. The FDA’s proposal will simply complicate the food label without providing consumers any real benefit.
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