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Food Marketing Terms

Consumers should make an effort to know

By Anitha Lakshminarayanan

With seemingly aggressive marketers selling food with fancy labels, does it make you anxious when you look at each food prod-

uct? More often than not, we see the big labels but don't pay much attention to what goes into the product.

The impact of food labelling has been a topic of debate over the years across many countries.

According to a market research report from the UAE, "85% of the people do not read the entire food label or bother to read the nutrition list." In UK, just over half of people don't understand food labelling.

Misleading imagery that can make products seem healthier than they are is raising concern amongst consumers.

"The package might say 'low fat potato chips'; however, when you check the ingredients, it turns out the calories are more, which may not be good, especially if you are trying to lose weight," says Yasmeen, a gym instructor at an elite health club.

So put healthy eating on high alert. Inquire and understand what food marketing terms like *organic*, *processed*, *unprocessed*, *natural*, *whole*, *local* and *imported* mean.

Natural

The label 'natural' means that most of the ingredients are not processed, and free of pesticides, chemicals and genetically modified organisms.



The USDA (US Department of Agriculture) allows the use of the term 'natural' to be used in meat and poultry labelling, that is, on products that contain no artificial ingredients or added colour. The product must also be minimally processed. The label must also explain the use of the term natural, for example: 'no added coloring,' 'minimally processed'.

'Natural' is perhaps one of the most persuasive words advertisers use to mislead consumers and shoppers. For example, the label reads 'Natural Potato Chips' but the process involved in making them uses artificial additives and/or preservatives.

One more common product claim is '100% natural juice'. When you go through the list of ingredients, it contains citric acid, which we all know is a preservative.

Local

Locally grown food is produced locally or grown in the region where you live. As per USDA, produce sourced within 400 miles from the place you live is considered local.

UAE has an abundant selection of locally produced meat, fruits, veg-

etables and dairy products. Check if the item is certified by the Emirates Authority for Standardization and Metrology (ESMA).

Processed

Processed food can be defined as "food that changes from its pure form by undergoing a process". Although processed food is convenient for people on the move, it is considered unhealthy as it usually contains more sodium, salt and trans fats.

When buying processed food, use the traffic light system (that indicates quality of food from low, medium, high as green, amber and red colours respectively), and double-check the label for fat, salt, sugar and saturates.

Whole

Whole food products generally refer to food items that are not processed or refined, and do not have any added ingredients.

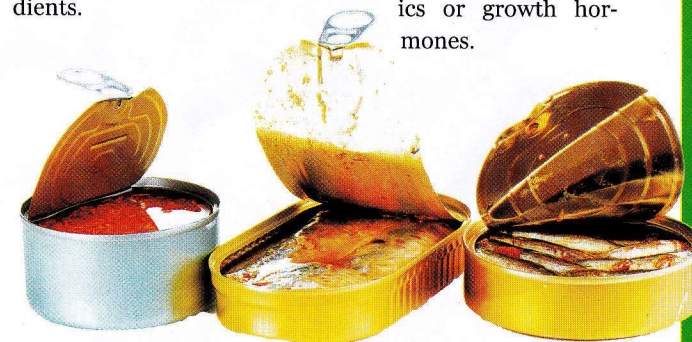
They have more fiber and other nutrients than those that have been refined – a process that strips away the healthiest portions of the grain.

By most definitions, whole foods include fresh produce, dairy, whole grains, meat and fish – meaning any food that appears in its most pure form with minimal processing.

When it comes to bread, don't go by colour alone. Some darker breads or crackers have caramel colouring, and are no healthier than highly refined white breads.

Organic

Organic food does not contain any pesticides or fertilizers, is not irradiated and is free of antibiotics or hormones from the time of its harvest in the field to finished food product stage. Organic meat, poultry, eggs and dairy products come from animals that are given no antibiotics or growth hormones.



Organic plant foods are produced without using conventional pesticides, fertilizers made with synthetic ingredients or sewage sludge, bioengineering or ionizing radiation.

In addition to the health benefits that organic food provides, it also helps the environment by way of not using pesticides that destroy natural habitats.

About 28 organic farms have been certified by the Emirates regulatory authority in the UAE.

So no matter what the packaging says, what you need to do is to check what exactly you are looking for. Food manufacturers will continue to find ways and means to lure you into buying their products.

For the health conscious...

0 Calories: Contains fewer than 5 calories per serving.

Cholesterol-free: Con-

tains fewer than 2mg of cholesterol and 2 grams or less of saturated fat per serving.

Enriched:

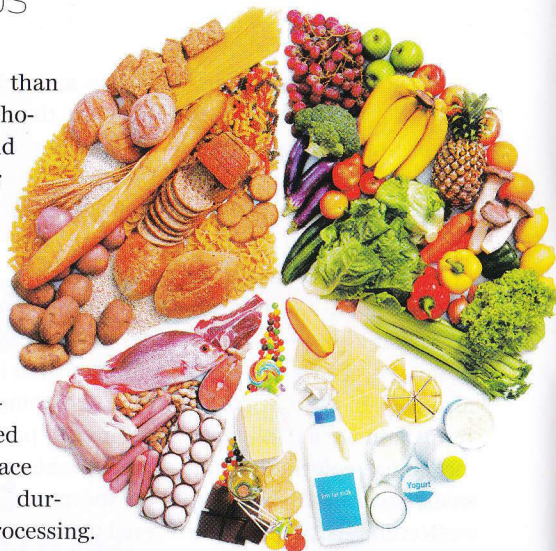
Enriched food has nutrients added to it to replace

those lost during food processing.

B vitamins, for example, are lost when wheat is processed into white flour, so these nutrients are later added back.

Fat-free: Contains fewer than 0.5 grams of fat per serving.

Fortified: Fortified food has nutrients added to it that weren't there originally. Milk, for example, is fortified with Vitamin D, a nutrient that helps you absorb dairy calcium.



High fiber: Contains 5 grams or more fiber and 3 grams or less fat per serving.

Light: Contains one-third fewer calories than the regular version, or less than 50 percent fat per serving.

Low calorie: Contains 40 or fewer calories per serving.

Low cholesterol: Has 20mg or less of cholesterol, and 2 grams or less saturated fat per serving.

Low fat: Contains 3 grams or less fat per serving.

No added sugar: No sugars were added during processing.

Reduced: Contains at least 25% fewer calories, sodium, or sugar than the regular version.

Sugar-free: Contains fewer than 0.5 grams of sugar per serving.



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