

US food companies cut 6.4 trillion calories

January 9 2014, by Mary Clare Jalonick



The nutrition information is shown on the back of a Campbell's Chicken Noodle soup can in Washington, Wednesday, Jan. 8, 2014. Some of the nation's largest food companies have cut their calories by the trillions according to a new study. (AP Photo/J. David Ake)

Some of the largest U.S. food companies have cut more than 6.4 trillion calories from their products as part of a fight against obesity, according to a new study.

The study sponsored by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation found

between 2007 and 2012 the companies reduced their products' [calories](#) by the equivalent of around 78 calories per person per day. The total is more than four times the amount those companies had pledged to cut by next year.

Seventy-eight calories would be about the same as an average cookie or a medium apple, and the federal government estimates an average daily diet at around 2,000 calories. The study said the calories cut averaged out to 78 [calories per day](#) for the entire U.S. population.

The 2010 pledge taken by 16 companies—including General Mills Inc., Campbell Soup Co., ConAgra Foods Inc., Kraft Foods Inc., Kellogg Co., Coca-Cola Co., PepsiCo Inc. and Hershey Co.—was to cut 1 trillion calories by 2012 and 1.5 trillion calories by 2015.

The companies are part of an industry coalition of food businesses called the Healthy Weight Commitment Foundation that has organized to help reduce obesity. The foundation pledged to reduce the calories as part of an agreement with a group of nonprofit organizations and made the 2010 announcement as part of first lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move campaign to combat [childhood obesity](#).

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation signed on to hold the companies accountable, and that group hired researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to painstakingly count the calories in almost every single packaged item in the grocery store.

The researchers aren't yet releasing the entire study, but they said Thursday that the companies have exceeded their own goals by a wide margin.

Dr. James Marks, director of the Health Group at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, said the group is pleased with the results but the

companies "must sustain that reduction, as they've pledged to do, and other [food companies](#) should follow their lead."

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is a nonpartisan philanthropic and research organization that works to improve the nation's health.

Even though the companies that made the commitment represent most of the nation's most well-known food companies, they sold only around a third of all packaged foods and beverages at the beginning of the study. Missing are many off-label brands sold under the names of retailers, and it's unknown whether those products have changed.

It is also unclear how the reduction in calories translates into consumers' diets.

Many products now come in lower calorie versions, are baked instead of fried, or sold in miniature as well as larger versions.

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Citation: US food companies cut 6.4 trillion calories (2014, January 9) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-01-food-companies-trillion-calories.html>

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