

# Appropriate reference amounts important for effective use of nutrition labelling information

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A recent study by Professor Monique Raats of the University of Surrey's Food, Consumer Behaviour and Health Research Centre, in conjunction with the European Food Information Council (EUFIC) in Brussels, has shown that consumers do take into account reference amounts displayed on front of pack nutrition labelling when making their judgements of healthfulness, thus highlighting their importance for the effective presentation of nutrition information.

Reference amounts express the quantity of [food](#) for which the [nutrition information](#) is being presented and are predominantly 'per 100g/100ml' or 'per portion/unit'.

Legislation in the EU requires a mandatory nutrition declaration on pre-packed foods expressed 'per 100g' or 'per 100ml' on back of pack, but this can also be supplemented by nutrition information 'per portion' on the front of pack.

A total of 13,117 participants from six European countries (France, Germany, Poland, Spain, Sweden and UK) took part in an online experiment in which they rated foods on their healthfulness using nutrition labels derived from differing reference amounts; 'typical portion', 'half typical portion' and 'per 100g'.

The study, published in the *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*,

reveals that overall, participants correctly ranked foods according to their objective healthfulness and could distinguish between more and less healthful variants of foods with the nutrition labels provided. The research also showed that where the reference amount was very different from the 'typical' [portion size](#), as was the case for foods such as biscuits, foods with a 'per 100g' label were rated significantly less healthful than when the [nutrition labels](#) were presented as 'typical' or 'half typical' portions.

Comparing country ratings, French consumers displayed a tendency to rate most extreme for both the less healthful and the more healthful variants of the foods, whereas in Poland, participants did not differentiate as much between more and less healthful variants.

Selection of appropriate reference amounts is central to current debates within the scientific community regarding [nutrition](#) profiling systems and their ability to classify foods according to their healthfulness.

**More information:** Raats MM, Hieke S, Jola C, Hodgkins C, Kennedy J, Wills J (2014). Reference amounts utilised in front of package nutrition labelling; impact on product healthfulness evaluations. *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. Published online ahead of print 5 Nov 2014. [DOI: 10.1038/ejcn.2014.190](https://doi.org/10.1038/ejcn.2014.190)

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