

Perth shoppers see stars in the supermarket

April 5 2016, by Kerry Faulkner, Sciencenetwork Wa



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Shoppers want food labels that have already done the hard sums on nutritional value for them, and Perth's grocery buyers have recently revealed their appetite for food labels rests with the Health Star Rating (HSR) system.

They picked this over the Daily Intake Guide (DIG) label which has been used on Australian [food](#) packages for the last decade.

The Heart Foundation says Australia's obesity rate is one of the highest in the world and there is increased need for food labelling that easily identifies healthy products.

It retired its 28-year-old 'tick' last year, with Chief Executive Officer Mary Barry saying it had run its course.

However, it had been the target of criticism from top nutritionists over its appearance on junk foods like hamburger and pies.

It's been replaced by the HSR where 0.5 stars is the unhealthiest, up to a healthy five stars.

HSR considers negatives like fat, salt and sugar and positives like protein, fruit and vegetable content then evaluates overall [nutritional value](#) with a star rating.

Curtin University researchers found the star rating system was the most preferred label when tested in Perth focus groups against the DIG and the Multiple Traffic Light (MTL) system.

The MTL system gives nutritional content overlayed on red, green and orange circles; red is an unhealthy amount and green is healthy. It was the second most preferred label.

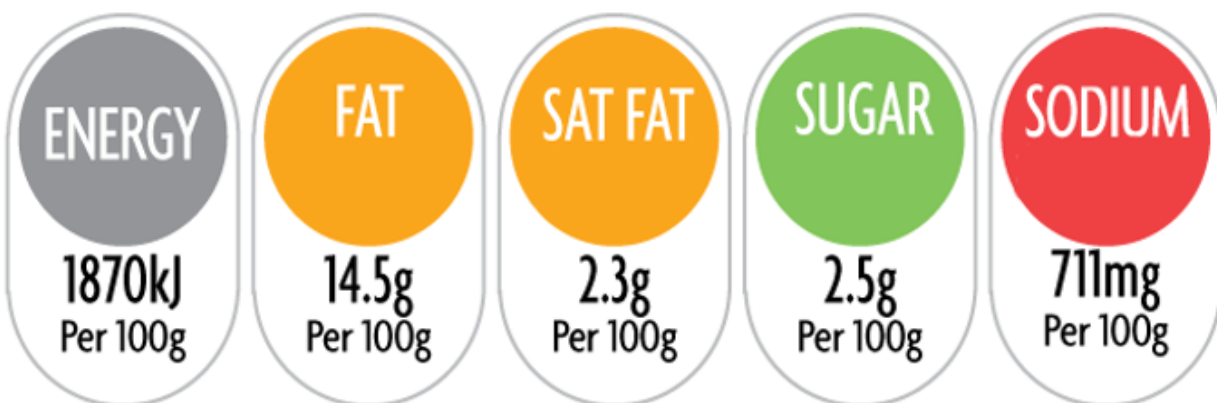


The health star rating system

The study findings were remarkably consistent across the ten focus groups totalling 85 people, lead researcher Dr Zenobia Talati says.

They overwhelmingly preferred HSR because it was easy to understand in making fast and effective decisions.

One female focus group participant says HSR is a simpler way to determine the healthiness of a product.



The traffic light system.

"You could tell your kids, 'look, don't bother asking me for anything below three stars'...this immediately, I think, knocks out a lot of products straight away, so that you can just focus on the best of the best," she says.

Dr Talati says it is difficult for health ratings to get noticed at all on supermarket shelves when compared to price and tastiness and for many consumers health ratings are not a priority anyway.

The one notable exception to shoppers HSR preference was on [junk food](#) as they didn't want to be confronted by its poor nutritional value on the label.

However, Dr Talati says with 35 per cent of adult Australians' calorie intake from these junk foods, people were probably snacking too often.

This article first appeared on [ScienceNetwork Western Australia](#) a science news website based at Scitech.

Provided by Science Network WA

Citation: Perth shoppers see stars in the supermarket (2016, April 5) retrieved 26 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-04-perth-shoppers-stars-supermarket.html>

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