

# FDA to re-evaluate definition of 'healthy'

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This Oct. 14, 2015, file photo, shows the Food & Drug Administration campus in Silver Spring, Md. The Food and Drug Administration says it will reevaluate its definition of "healthy," which could upend how a range of foods are marketed. The FDA currently allows use of the term on packaging only when products meet certain nutrient criteria. (AP Photo/Andrew Harnik, File)

The Food and Drug Administration will re-evaluate its definition of "healthy," which could eventually change how a range of foods are marketed.

In light of evolving research, the FDA said it believes "now is an opportune time to re-evaluate the regulations concerning nutrition content claims, generally, including the term 'healthy.'" The agency plans to solicit public comment on the matter in the near future, said Lauren Kotwicki, an FDA representative, in an email.

The FDA currently allows use of the term "healthy" on packaging only when products meet certain nutrient criteria, which largely revolve around limited levels of fat, cholesterol and sodium. The issue captured attention last year after the FDA sent a warning letter to the maker of Kind fruit-and-nut bars saying the company's products should not be labeled as healthy because of their saturated fat levels.

Kind then sought a reevaluation of the term's definition from the FDA, noting the fat in its bars comes from nuts. It noted the FDA's rules prevent avocados and salmon from being labeled healthy, while allowing the term for fat-free puddings and sugary cereals.

After some back-and-forth on the matter, the FDA told Kind in an email last month that it did not object to the company's use of the term "healthy and tasty" on its bar wrappers. The FDA said it is allowing use of the phrase framed as a "corporate philosophy," rather than as a nutrient content claim.

The move to rethink "healthy" comes as dietary trends have shifted, with more people expressing concern about sugar and questioning low-fat or low-calorie diets. But any change in the term's regulatory definition could take years. The FDA's final rule on gluten-free labeling, for instance, took more than six years to complete.

In a statement Tuesday, the FDA also noted that foods that do not meet all the current regulatory criteria for the term "healthy" are not necessarily unhealthy.

"Conversely, just because a food contains certain ingredients that are considered good for you, such as fruit or nuts, it does not mean that the food can bear a 'healthy' nutrient content claim," the FDA said.

The FDA said that Susan Mayne, director of its Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition, discussed the agency's plans to revisit the term "healthy" at conferences in recent weeks. The agency's plans were reported in the Wall Street Journal on Tuesday.

Last month, the House of Representatives also said in a report accompanying its agriculture appropriations bill that it expects the FDA to amend its regulation for "healthy" claims to be based on scientific agreement.

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