

Coloured nutritional labels could help consumers make healthier choices

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Credit: Curtin University

The effectiveness of the Health Star Rating system in helping consumers make healthier food choices could be increased by using colour, new research led by Curtin University has found.

The research, published in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, examined the potential to enhance the Health Star Rating by adding [colour](#) and limiting it to the Health Star Rating icon.

John Curtin Distinguished Professor Simone Pettigrew, from the School of Psychology at Curtin University and The George Institute for Global Health, said calls had been made in Australia to add colour to front-of-pack nutritional labels to enhance their effectiveness.

"It is important for front-of-pack nutritional labels to assist consumers with making healthier choices for themselves and their families. Previous research shows that front-of-pack nutritional labels that can be quickly and easily understood are more effective in influencing healthier product choices," Professor Pettigrew said.

"An [online survey](#) was administered to 1,033 Australian adults who were shown four packs of breakfast cereal of varying levels of healthiness and then nominated the product they would prefer to buy, as well as the one they thought was the healthiest.

"The study participants saw various versions of the Health Star Rating that differed according to whether they were in black and white or colour, or showed the star icon alone or accompanied by individual nutrient icons. The coloured versions used the traffic light colours of green, amber and red to indicate the healthiness of the product."

The study found that front -of-pack nutritional labels that were in full colour and only had the Health Star Rating were more helpful to consumers compared to black and white labels or those that included additional nutrient icons.

Professor Pettigrew explained that using colours was important for attracting attention and quickly communicating healthiness, and that

having too much information on products in the supermarket could be distracting for consumers, leading them to make poorer choices.

"Our findings have important implications for [policy makers](#) who should consider the evolution of the Health Star Rating towards a more interpretive presentation that includes colour and excludes the nutrient icons. This would help consumers make better food choices for themselves and their families," Professor Pettigrew said.

The research was co-authored by researchers from the School of Psychology at Curtin University.

The full paper is titled, 'Enhancing the effectiveness of the Health Star Rating via presentation modifications.'

More information: *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* (2019). [DOI: 10.1111/1753-6405.12952](https://doi.org/10.1111/1753-6405.12952)

Provided by Curtin University

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