

Recent study identifies effective nutrition labels for India's diverse population

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Please rank these products according to their relative nutritional quality, from highest to lowest nutritional quality. You can enlarge any area by hovering on it.



	▽
Highest nutritional quality	
Medium nutritional quality	
Lowest nutritional quality	

	▽
Highest nutritional quality	
Medium nutritional quality	
Lowest nutritional quality	

	▽
Highest nutritional quality	
Medium nutritional quality	
Lowest nutritional quality	

☐ I don't know.

Example of a ranking task in a label condition. Credit: *Food Quality and Preference* (2023). DOI: 10.1016/j.foodqual.2023.105025

Research at the George Institute for Global Health has provided important insights into the creation of front-of-pack nutrition labels (FoPLs) that are easy to understand and promote healthier food choices.

FoPLs of different types (reductive / interpretive) highlighting various components of packaged [food](#) are in use in many parts of the world. They are mandatory in some countries and voluntarily applied by

manufacturers in others. FoPLs provide key [information](#) on food components that consumers can use to make choices and purchasing decisions, such as avoiding unhealthy options and choosing healthier ones.

India, which does not have an FoPL system in place yet, intends to implement one to promote informed decision-making on packaged food purchasing, as part of promoting healthier diets in the population.

While the use of FoPLs is linked to a lower risk of death and has been shown to be an equitable intervention across income groups, interpretive FoPLs, like the Health Star Rating, Multiple Traffic Lights, Nutri-Score, and Warning labels, offer an assessment of the nutritional quality of food products that is quicker and simpler to understand than the more complex information contained in the nutrition information panel.

As the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India(FSSAI) prepares to implement a front-of-pack label system in India, it is important to address the information needs and preferences of the population, and to develop a front-of-pack label (FoPL) that combines utility and acceptability for optimal impact. India is very diverse in literacy, especially health literacy, and in food habits and preferences. An FoPL in [effective use](#) elsewhere in the world cannot be applied directly to the Indian market. Responsiveness to the concerns of consumers, and adaptation to the range of literacy levels is essential in the development of an optimal FoPL for India.

This study was undertaken to inform the selection and development of an FoPL that addresses India's needs and preferences. This information may help the Indian population make better grocery and food choices. This is a crucial step towards tackling India's continuing nutrition shift and the increased prevalence of unhealthy packaged foods.

Commissioned by the World Health Organization, India, along with researchers Simone Pettigrew, Josyula K. Lakshmi, Palak Mahajan, and D. Praveen from The George Institute for Global Health, Michelle I. Jongenelis, Melbourne Center for Behavior Change and Claire Johnson, UNICEF, International Union against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease, conducted the study. The [findings](#), published in *Food Quality and Preference*, can inform the Indian government's selection of a new FoPL system for India to give consumers easier access to nutritional information and healthier food options.

The world's most populous nation, India, has seen a marked change in eating habits, with a rise in the intake of processed and unhealthy foods. Nutrition-related diseases and obesity are becoming more prevalent. To solve this issue, the Indian government is developing and putting into place a front-of-pack nutrition labeling system.

The study included a survey of 1,270 adults from different regions of India to evaluate five different front-of-pack nutrition labels in use in different parts of the world, adapted to the Indian context.

Key findings from the study:

1. 2-color Multiple Traffic Lights label performs best:
Outperforming other labels, the 2-color Multiple Traffic Lights label was found to be the most successful in terms of both objective knowledge and food choice results.
2. Color enhances interpretation: The study emphasizes how crucial it is to use color to help with interpretation when creating the new nutrition label that will be placed on products packaging in India.
3. Consumer-friendly information: All front-of-pack nutrition labels that were examined had positive effects on perception, choice, and objective comprehension results. This highlights the

potential contribution of such labels to helping consumers make healthier food choices.

4. Nutrient-specific information preferred: Indian consumers evinced a preference for nutrient-specific information over summary indicator-only labels.

This study compared five FoPLs (adapted to the Indian context) on understanding of information presented and influence on food choice. Participants' perceptions of the labels' appearance, credibility, and usefulness were also elicited. These findings can inform the selection and adaptation of an informative and useful FoPL system for Indian consumers.

Dr. D Praveen, Researcher from The George Institute for Global Health said "Through extensive consultation with a diverse spectrum of Indian consumers, our study has conclusively shown that a 2-color [label](#) utilizing a traffic light format not only provides useful information but is also widely deemed effective, useful, and likable by most respondents. These findings hold immense potential to inform and guide the Indian Government in its ongoing efforts to implement a Front-of-Pack Labeling (FoPL) system that incorporates the features of this highly effective design."

The study's findings can serve as a reference to the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) and the Indian government when they work to create a front-of-pack nutrition labeling system. The goal is to promote healthier eating habits and slow the rise in diet-related illnesses by giving Indian customers easily available and understandable information about the nutritional value of packaged foods.

The implementation of an FoPL system will have the immediate effect of stimulating interest in the composition of packaged foods and raising awareness of the relative healthiness of various packaged food products,

to enable people to make informed choices and decisions of food purchasing. It will also encourage transparency on the composition of packaged food, by packaged food manufacturers.

The sensitization to food composition and the healthiness of various food components will contribute to greater nutrition literacy and health literacy in general. Information and an enabling environment are vital for individuals and communities to be active, and proactive, in protecting and promoting their health. An effective and well-accepted FoPL system can be a key element in promoting healthier lifestyles.

This revolutionary research represents a significant advancement in India's efforts to build a more knowledgeable and health-conscious population where people may make educated food decisions to promote their general well-being.

More information: Simone Pettigrew et al, Developing and testing front-of-pack nutrition labels in India: An experimental study, *Food Quality and Preference* (2023). DOI: [10.1016/j.foodqual.2023.105025](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodqual.2023.105025)

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