Misleading Claims

# Tips and tricks for the grocery store

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## Watch out for misleading claims. Always look at the nutrition facts label and the ingredients list. Below are a few of the misleading claims found on food labels.

1. All natural

Foods labeled “all natural” cannot have added colors, artificial flavors, or synthetic substances. However, a food labeled “all natural” may have preservatives, high fructose corn syrup, or extra sodium.

1. No sugar added

Keep in mind that no sugar added foods likely still have sugar. Most foods such as fruits, vegetables, milk and grains, naturally have sugar. While it is good that no sugar has been added, remember that “no sugar added” does not mean the food has 0 sugar.

1. Sugar free

Sugar free does not mean a food has fewer calories than a full-sugar food. It may have more. Sugar-free foods often have more fat to make up for the taste and texture that is lost when there is less sugar.

1. Zero trans fat

Foods that claim zero trans-fat can still have up to .5 grams per serving. If you eat more than one serving, this small amount adds up. Check for words on the ingredient list such as hydrogenated oil, partially hydrogenated oil, and shortening, which means that trans-fat is still in the food.

1. Fat free

Just like “sugar free” claims, “fat free” claims do not mean that the food is low calorie. These foods likely have extra sugar to make up for the lesser amount of fat.

1. Light

Although “light” may make you think that the food is lower in calories, it can refer to the flavor rather than the nutrition. For example, light olive oil means the flavor is mild, not that the calories are any lower than regular olive oil.

1. Gluten free

Gluten is a protein found in grains that can be harmful to people with gluten allergies or celiac disease. There are more gluten-free foods out there, which helps people who have trouble digesting gluten. But labeling may be a little confusing. Gluten free does not mean the food is whole grain, has more fiber, or has fewer carbohydrates. Gluten-free foods are for people who need them. They will not help you lose weight, and they are not automatically good for you.

1. Made with real fruit

Foods that claim to be made from real fruit may not have very much fruit at all. It may not have any of the fruit pictured on the box. Food companies do not need to list the amount of fruit, so a food claiming “made with real fruit” can have anywhere from 100% fruit to 1% fruit.

1. Lightly sweetened

The FDA, Food and Drug Administration, has definitions for reduced sugar, no added sugar, and sugar free. But “lightly sweetened” has no regulations associated with it. So, you cannot be sure how much sugar the food has by looking at the packaging. Instead, read the nutrition facts label.

1. Per serving

Food companies can be tricky with serving sizes. To make a food look low in fat or calories, they may list information based on a small, unrealistic serving size. Look at the serving size and make an educated choice based on how much you usually eat.

1. Catchy claims

Food labels often make claims about the benefits of their brand, like “cholesterol free” and “fat free”. These can be misleading for some foods. For example, a brand of vegetable oil that says “cholesterol free” may seem healthier than other vegetable oil brands. But since vegetable oil is a plant product, it does not naturally have cholesterol. This means all vegetable oils are cholesterol free. Similarly, fruit juice brands claiming to be “fat free” are not healthier because fruit juice is naturally fat free. Be aware of claims like these on food labels. Make sure to do a “common sense” check before making a choice.

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