



National Poll on Children's Health

Nutrition Facts: How Moms and Dads View Labels Differently

Volume 22
Issue 3
October 27, 2014

Report Highlights

Mothers (46%) are more likely than fathers (33%) to say that nutrition information helps them decide which food or drink to buy "very often" or "always."

Sugars (total and added) topped the list of "very important" nutrients that parents consider.

Mothers are more likely than fathers to say total sugar, added sugar, protein, and dietary fiber are "very important."

Contact us

A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics and Communicable Diseases, and the University of Michigan Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Unit.

"Nutrition Facts" labels are required for most foods sold in the United States. In June 2014, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) proposed key changes to the labels, to feature clearer information about calories, fat, and sugar. The idea of the changes in the nutrition facts label is to help people make healthier choices when they buy food in stores.

To find out whether mothers and fathers use nutrition labels differently, in June 2014, the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked parents across the U.S. about how they use nutrition labels.

How Often are Nutrition Labels Used?

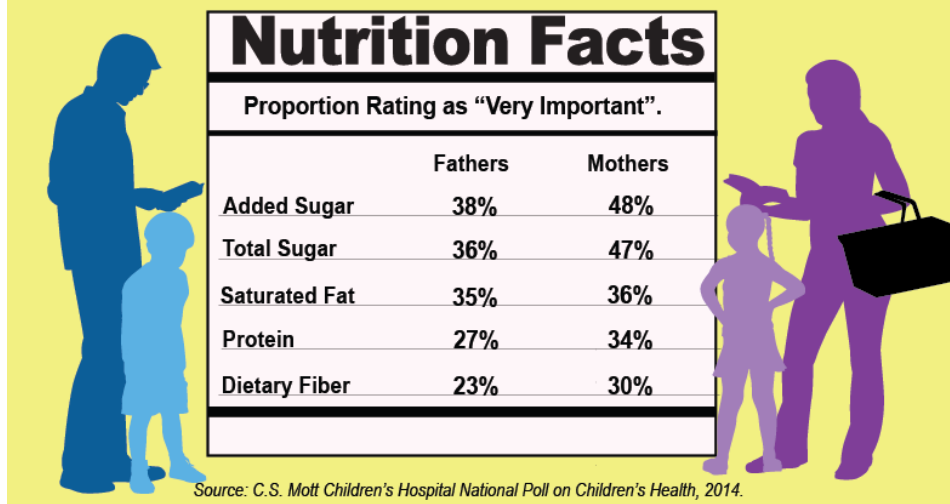
When asked how often they read nutrition labels when buying food, mothers (40%) are more likely to say "very often" or "always," compared with fathers (35%). More fathers (16%) than mothers (10%) indicate they "never" read nutrition labels.

When asked about a situation where they are comparing two similar foods or drinks to buy, 46% of mothers versus 33% of fathers say that information from the nutrition label "very often" or "always" influences their decisions.

Mothers and fathers also differ in how they rate the importance of several nutrients in foods or drinks as they read nutrition labels (Figure 1). Differences between mothers and fathers are present even when adjusting for parents' age, race/ethnicity, income, and whether the parent is obese.

For some nutrients on food labels mothers and fathers have similar views on their importance including total fat (30% of parents overall said "very important"), cholesterol (30%), vitamins (26%) and minerals (21%).

Figure 1. Proportion of Fathers and Mothers that Rate Information on Food Labels as "Very Important".



This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by GfK Custom Research, LLC (GfK), for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital via a method used in many published studies. The survey was administered in June 2014 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults age 18 and older from GfK's web-enabled KnowledgePanel® that closely resembles the U.S. population. Responses from parents with a child 0-17 (n=1,481) were used for this report. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 53% among the parent panel members contacted to participate. The margin of error is ± 3 to 5 percentage points.

Implications

For the first time in two decades—the time period when the obesity epidemic has spread across the United States—the FDA is contemplating major changes to the Nutrition Facts labels. The goal is that clearer information can help steer people away from foods and drinks that are not healthy for them, and toward foods with nutrients that can protect and improve their health.

The results in this Poll indicate that mothers and fathers differ substantially in how they use the current labels to make decisions about buying food and drink. We didn't explore the reasons for these differences in this Poll, but it is possible these findings indicate that mothers are more engaged than fathers in considering overall nutrition. If that is the case, it has implications for thinking about how to reach out to families to encourage healthy nutrition choices. Although fathers may go to the grocery store less often than mothers in general, it is still important for fathers to make nutritious choices that safeguard their children's health.

Mothers and fathers also differ regarding the importance of various nutrients in their decision-making, with mothers saying that several nutrients are more important than the fathers indicated. These differences could be related to how women versus men prioritize nutritional value of food versus other attributes (eg, price, packaging, size), or maybe that women versus men do more comparative shopping that naturally leads them to include comparisons of nutrition labels in their decision-making.

Of note, parents generally agree about the rank order of importance of different nutrients – sugars and fats high, vitamins and minerals low. This ordering may indicate that the “Nutrition Facts” labels that emphasize sources of calories (fats, sugars) at the top of the label in large print have had an impact on purchasers' perceptions. If improvements are made to the nutrition labels for greater impact in the future, the FDA may want to consider how different emphases in the current label appear to have shaped mothers' and fathers' impressions of what is important today.

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