



## **NUTRIENT SPECIFIC DIET-RELATED HEALTH CLAIMS TO BE ALLOWED FOR QUALIFIED FOOD PRODUCTS**

Following the completion of a review by the Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority (AVA), nutrient specific diet-related health claims will be allowed for qualified food products with immediate effect. The review was done in consultation with the Health Promotion Board (HPB), and the outcome is aligned with the guidelines of major developed countries.

2 Local food manufacturers and importers may now apply for the use of the following nutrient specific diet-related health claims on their products:

- (i) A healthy diet with adequate calcium and vitamin D, with regular exercise, helps to achieve strong bones and may reduce the risk of osteoporosis. (*Name of food*) is a good source of/high in/enriched in/fortified with calcium.
- (ii) A healthy diet low in sodium may reduce the risk of high blood pressure, a risk factor for stroke and heart disease. (*Name of food*) is sodium free/ low in/ very low/ reduced in sodium.
- (iii) A healthy diet low in saturated fat and trans fat, may reduce the risk of heart disease. (*Name of food*) is free of/ low in saturated fats, trans fats.
- (iv) A healthy diet rich in whole grains, fruits and vegetables that contain dietary fibre may reduce the risk of heart disease. (*Name of food*) is low/free of fat and high in dietary fibre.
- (v) A healthy diet rich in fibre-containing foods such as whole grains, fruits and vegetables may reduce the risk of some types of cancers. (*Name of food*) is free/ low in fat and high in dietary fibre.

3 Only food products that have been approved by HPB to carry the Healthier Choice Symbol may be considered for the use of the above health claims in their food labels.

4 The use of the approved health claims will help consumers make informed decisions when selecting food products with health benefits.

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5 Detailed information on applications for use of the approved health claims can be found at AVA's website:

<http://www.ava.gov.sg/FoodSector/FoodLabelingAdvertisement/>.

Information on application for use of the the Healthier Choice Symbol can be found at HPB's website: [http://www.hpb.gov.sg/hpb/default.asp?pg\\_id=1019](http://www.hpb.gov.sg/hpb/default.asp?pg_id=1019).

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## **Additional Q&As**

### **Q1 : What do “health claims” for food products mean?**

According to the guidelines on health claims developed by the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC), a health claim refers to any representation that states, suggests, or implies that a relationship exists between a food or a constituent of that food, and health. CAC is the international food standards body established by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations and the World Health Organisation.

### **Q2 : Why are health claims for food products allowed now?**

Health claims for food products have not been allowed previously because there was a lack of scientific evidence to show that consumption of any food in itself can lead to an improved health condition. AVA and HPB have been following international regulatory and scientific developments on the subject, and are of the view that there is currently good evidence base on the link between consumption of specific foods and improved health condition.

Over the past years HPB has been working with the food industry to make available healthier products under the Healthier Choice Symbol Programme (HCS). Today, there are about 2400 products in the market carrying the HCS, which span across more than 60 food categories, providing a wide variety of products for consumers to choose from. Both AVA and HPB are of the view that introduction of these claims now is timely, as there is a good range of HCS products that can potentially carry these health claims. Choosing these healthier products, as part of a balanced diet, will help consumers meet their nutritional needs, thus helping to reduce their risks of diet-related diseases.

### **Q3 : Why are the five nutrient specific diet-related health claims allowed for use now?**

In 2004, CAC adopted a new set of Guidelines for Use of Nutrition and Health Claims. In the revised guidelines, CAC advised that health claims should be consistent with national health policy, including nutrition policy, and support such policies where applicable. They should be supported by sound and sufficient scientific evidence to substantiate the claim which must provide truthful and non-misleading information to help consumers in choosing healthful diets. Health claims should also be supported by specific consumer education. In addition, the impact of health claims on consumers' eating behaviours and dietary patterns should be monitored by competent national authorities. At the same time, CAC's technical committee on nutrition started developing the recommended scientific basis for evaluation of health claims. The committee completed its draft recommendations in November 2008. These recommendations will be considered for adoption by CAC in July 2009.

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With the new guidelines from CAC, and the recent international move towards providing health advice to consumers in food labels and advertisements so as to promote healthier dietary patterns in major developed countries such as Canada, the US and the EU, AVA decided to review the existing regulations on use of health claims in Singapore.

As part of the review, HPB advised that the following are the most relevant diseases and health challenges faced by the Singapore population :

- (a) calcium and reduced risk of osteoporosis;
- (b) saturated fat, trans fat and increased risk of coronary heart disease;
- (c) wholegrain products, fruits and vegetables and reduced risk of cancer;
- (d) fruits, vegetables and wholegrain products and reduced risk of coronary heart disease; and
- (e) sodium and increased risk of hypertension.

The approved health claims can potentially address the above diseases and health challenges.

**Q4 : Why is approval to carry the Healthier Choice Symbol by HPB a pre-requisite for products to be considered for use of the nutrient specific diet-related health claims?**

This requirement is to ensure that products to be considered to carry health claims meet the basic criteria to qualify as "healthier" in terms of nutrient content. This is also in line with international practice. HPB's Healthier Choice Symbol endorsed products are lower in fat, saturated fat, trans fat, sugar and salt or higher in dietary fibre and calcium compared to the regular products within the same food category.

**Q5: Besides HPB, did AVA take reference from any other expert organisations in conducting the review?**

In conducting the review, AVA took reference from Health Canada and the US Food and Drug Administration, as well as Singapore's existing national nutrient claims guidelines established by HPB. The links between the nutrients and the respective diseases mentioned in the claims have been well proven by generally accepted scientific evidence, as required under the recommendations developed by CAC's technical committee on nutrition. AVA's recommendations was also evaluated and endorsed by AVA's International Advisory Committee of Experts.

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**Q6 : How can consumers benefit from these health messages?**

Consumers will be better informed of the health benefits of the food products they wish to purchase, and may plan a healthier and balanced diet by selecting these healthier products.

**Q7 : What are the penalties for using the health claims in labels and advertisements of food products that do not meet the stated criteria?**

The use of misleading claims in food labels is an offence under the Food Regulations. Any person who contravenes this provision shall be liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding \$1,000 and in the case of a second or subsequent conviction to a fine not exceeding \$2,000.

**Q8 : Are there any plans to further review the use of health claims?**

Yes. The next phase of the review will be focused on developing guidelines for use of claims on specific health beneficial effects of food ingredients, other than the macronutrients (e.g. carbohydrates, fats and proteins) and micronutrients (e.g. vitamins and minerals).

As the evaluation process for such claims is complex, AVA will look into forming an advisory committee, comprising experts from relevant scientific disciplines. The advisory committee will evaluate future applications for use of these claims in Singapore, based on the recommended scientific basis for health claims eventually adopted by CAC.

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