

# Declaration of nutrition information on and nutritional quality of Thai ready-to-eat packaged food products

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## Abstract

**Objective:** The present study assessed the nutrition information displayed on ready-to-eat packaged foods and the nutritional quality of those food products in Thailand.

**Design:** In March 2015, the nutrition information panels and nutrition and health claims on ready-to-eat packaged foods were collected from the biggest store of each of the twelve major retailers, using protocols developed by the International Network for Food and Obesity/Non-communicable Diseases Research, Monitoring and Action Support (INFORMAS). The Thai Nutrient Profile Model was used to classify food products according to their nutritional quality as 'healthier' or 'less healthy'.

**Results:** In total, information from 7205 food products was collected across five broad food categories. Out of those products, 5707 (79.2%), 2536 (35.2%) and 1487 (20.6%) carried a nutrition facts panel, a Guideline Daily Amount (GDA) label and health-related claims, respectively. Only 4691 (65.1%) and 2484 (34.5%) of the products that displayed the nutrition facts or a GDA label, respectively, followed the guidelines of the Thai Food and Drug Administration. In total, 4689 products (65.1%) could be classified according to the Thai Nutrient Profile Model, of which 432 products (9.2%) were classified as healthier. Moreover, among the 1487 products carrying health-related claims, 1219 (82.0%) were classified as less healthy. Allowing less healthy food products to carry claims could mislead consumers and result in overconsumption of ready-to-eat food products.

**Conclusions:** The findings suggest effective policies should be implemented to increase the relative availability of healthier ready-to-eat packaged foods, as well as to improve the provision of nutrition information on labels in Thailand.

## Keywords

Food composition  
Food labeling  
Ready-to-eat foods Thailand

An unhealthy diet is one of the four major risk factors of the global leading cause of deaths known as non-communicable diseases (NCD)<sup>(1)</sup>. It is well recognized that diet-related NCD are increasing across the globe; however, the food supply differs across countries and varies with countries' economy and food cultures<sup>(2)</sup>. Dietary patterns are influenced by the healthiness of the food environment, including health-related labelling, nutritional quality of the food products available, food marketing and prices<sup>(3,4)</sup>, which are further shaped by private-sector and government policies and practices<sup>(4,5)</sup>.

To strengthen the development and implementation of countries' nutrition policies related to obesity and NCD, the International Network for Food and Obesity/Non-communicable Diseases Research, Monitoring and Action

Support (INFORMAS) developed a framework and protocols to monitor and benchmark the healthiness of national food environments and related obesity and NCD policies globally<sup>(4)</sup>. The overarching INFORMAS framework contains nine key modules including public policies and actions, private-sector policies and actions, food prices, food promotion, food provision, food retail, food trade and investment, food labelling and food composition.

Consumption of ultra-processed foods (ready-to-eat or to ready-to-heat foods such as savoury snacks, soft drinks, breads, biscuits, canned foods and flavoured milk) has been increasing considerably in low- and middle- income countries during the last decades and contributes significantly to the rising trend of obesity and diet-related NCD<sup>(6,7)</sup>. Thailand, a middle-income country, has been

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