

Impact of front-of-pack 'traffic-light' nutrition labelling on consumer food purchases in the UK

The global burden of nutrition-related non-communicable diseases is growing. As a consequence, governments around the world are seeking new ways to safeguard the health of their populations. Among the different tools explored, front-of-pack nutrition labelling has been identified as a potential initiative to improve the nutritional status of different groups. The United Kingdom is one example of a country that encourages the implementation of the multiple traffic light label on a range of products. Consequently, this paper aimed "to examine the impact that the introduction of the Food Standards Agency-recommended front-of-pack traffic-light labelling scheme has had on food sales in a major UK supermarket chain."

Overall, the multiple traffic-light label was introduced on a total of 15% of Ready Meal lines and 14% of total Sandwich lines. While only a small sample of products over a short period of time was analysed, the study showed that "sales of Ready Meals increased immediately after the introduction of traffic-light labels, whereas sales of sandwiches did not change significantly after the labels were introduced." From a public health perspective, results showed that there was no association between changes in products sales and the healthiness of the products. This could be due to a lack of consumers' understanding of the label, suggesting the need to increase our efforts on promoting nutrition literacy. However, this study has several limitations. The analysed products accounted only for a small subset of products with the traffic-light labels. Furthermore, the study failed to examine the long-term impact of the label on sales as well as on the reformulation of products. Further studies need to be conducted in order to identify whether this type of front-of-pack labelling can efficiently influence consumers' behaviours.

Reference: Sacks, G., Rayner, M. & Swinburn, B. Impact of front-of-pack 'traffic-light' nutrition labelling on consumer food purchases in the UK. *Health Promotion International*. 2009;24(4):344–352. DOI: [10.1093/heapro/dap032](https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/dap032)