

More Americans Checking Nutritional Labels: Nielsen

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:U.S. Consumers in increasing numbers are keeping their eyes peeled for nutritional information on labels, according to a new online global survey fielded by The Nielsen Company.

Americans today are looking for nutritional information on packaging more often than they did two years ago, they said in the survey. Nielsen found that while two-thirds, or 67 percent, of U.S. consumers say they "mostly" understand the nutritional information on food packaging, less than half (44 percent) of global consumers made the same claim.

"As obesity rates continue to rise globally, and with lifestyle-related heart disease the No. 1 killer worldwide today, there is increasing pressure on the food industry to play a greater role in educating consumers about what they're eating," said Deepak Varma, s.v.p. of Nielsen Customized Survey, which conducted the poll. "Given that so many consumers are taking time to read nutrition labels, there is also a marketing opportunity for food manufacturers to provide consumer-friendly information on labels that may entice shoppers to switch brands at the point of purchase."

The survey showed that over half of U.S. consumers, or 51 percent, always scan the fat content on nutrition labels, and almost as many read labels to find out about calorie content (48 percent) and trans fat content (43 percent).

For 25 percent of U.S. shoppers trying to lose weight, reading food labels has become a routine activity, while 15 percent of global consumers admit to similar behavior on a regular basis.

"The relationship between consumers and nutritional information and labeling provides unmistakable insight into health and diet concerns," said Varma. "Without question, nutritional labeling can be a powerful marketing tool for savvy food manufacturers. For example, food marketers can make relatively low investments in pack and labeling changes compared to advertising and promotions, and drive significant sales."

Among the survey's additional findings:

--While less than a quarter (21 percent) of U.S. consumers always check the nutritional information on food packaging, almost half (42 percent) check when considering buying a product for the first time.

--Eight percent of U.S. consumers never look at the nutritional information, on a par with the global average.

--Sixty-seven percent of U.S. consumers say they understand the difference between saturated fat and unsaturated fat, slightly higher than the global average of 60 percent.

--Worldwide, nearly half, or 42 percent, of consumers check food labels for preservatives, while just 24 percent of U.S. consumers said they do.

The survey was conducted in April among 28,253 Internet users in 51 markets in North America, Europe, Asia Pacific, and the Middle East.

The largest half-yearly survey of its kind, the Nielsen Global Online Consumer Confidence and Opinion Survey sheds light on current confidence levels, spending habits/intentions, and major concerns of consumers globally.

The Nielsen Company, a global information and media company, is the parent company of Progressive Grocer.