



Read Your Labels: Six Healthy Sounding Snack Food Scams

Another reason to “Read Your Labels”

Linda Bonvie

Vegetables, antioxidants, fiber – these are all good things, right? Sure, unless they are actually just your cabbage-variety junk food masquerading as healthful food substances.

With gazillions of products on store shelves vying for your attention, don't think that food and beverage manufacturers are unaware that consumers look for these buzz words, along with pictures of fruits and veggies on packaging. And they're especially tuned into the guilty feeling that comes with snacking on less than stellar foods — guilt they make no bones about taking advantage of. Below are six examples of these fraudulent products, followed by some tips on healthy substitutes you can choose so you won't fall prey to this snack-food scam.

Sweet Potato Chips from Food Should Taste Good:

I don't think even the company that makes this product is quite sure what it is. While “Sweet Potato” is presented in a great big font, further down, in much smaller letters it says “tortilla chips (it's a cracker too!)” and then the fact that it's really: “made with sweet potato.” Yes, it is made with some sweet potatoes, but this chip (or cracker, if you choose) is mostly made from corn. It's essentially a corn chip, which is fine if that's what you're looking for. But don't get misled by the sweet potato come-on.

Home-made sweet potato chips are quite easy to make. The hardest part is cutting the sweet potato which you can make much easier by using a man-

doline-type cutter. The rest is as easy as opening this bag of corn chips in disguise.

Veggie Crisps Mixed Vegetable Snack from Herr's:

Instead of the slick photo of veggies taking up a good top half of this bag, here's what would be depicted if Herr's accurately represented its contents: a bag of potato flour and potato starch, a bottle of canola oil, some “natural” flavors, more oil, and, finally – some tomato paste and spinach powder. Considering that one little ounce of ‘real’ spinach will give you 56 percent of your daily allowance of vitamin A, 14 percent of your C and five percent of your iron, this bag of corn flour chips contains zero of those nutrients, so whatever amount of paste and powder are in them doesn't amount to much of anything.

All Natural Veggie Sticks from Nice!:

Nice!, the new-ish Walgreens store brand has put a lot of thought into the package design of these potato flour thingies they call “veggie sticks.” Front and center is a “pot” labeled “spinach” with the “veggie” sticks in them bearing a sign that says “eat your greens.” Maybe they mean the color green, as the small amount of spinach powder these contain doesn't amount to a hill of, well, spinach.

Fiber Plus Antioxidants from Kellogg's:

If you just went by the front of this box you may think this product contains everything you need for health and happiness; fiber, antioxidants, coconut and fudge. With just one bar providing 35 percent of your daily fiber “value,” it sounds like a heck of a deal. But the fiber in these Kellogg's chewy bars

isn't from whole grains, but rather from chicory root fiber, an additive that food manufacturers love, since it adds loads of fiber to foods, is slightly sweet and mixes well with other ingredients without adding a strong flavor.

Unfortunately, one big problem with chicory root fiber is that individuals can differ greatly in just how much they can tolerate without suffering from gas, bloating, nausea and flatulence. Even small amounts can set some folks rumbling. So considering what Kellogg's is packing these bars with, perhaps you'd be better off not to try them for the first time on your way to that big job interview.

But it's not the turbulent chicory root fiber that puts these bars in the "fake" category. It's the rest of the ingredients, which include high fructose corn syrup, artificial flavors, artificial colors and partially hydrogenated oil – making this a healthy snack not.

Green Tea Ginger Ale from Canada Dry:

I don't care how many antioxidants they pump this with — it's still soda! And a soda with high fructose corn syrup as the second ingredient and two preservatives to boot. If it's green tea you're looking for there are numerous high quality ready-made brands (such as Honest Tea with honey) to choose from, or you can make your own with boiling water and some tea! I know it sounds crazy, but folks have been brewing tea like that for centuries, I'll bet you can probably do it, too.

Garden Veggie Straws from Sensible Portions:

The folks that designed the Garden Veggie Straws package must have had a moment of truth about this product. A small moment, perhaps, recorded in very small type way down on the bottom of the package, which refers to it as "potato snack." But that, of course, is eclipsed by the super-gigantic "veggie" name and basket of vegetables graphic. Actually, this product is pretty much comprised of potato flour and starch with some rice flour and JIOJ

Actually, this product is pretty much comprised of potato flour and starch with some rice flour and

corn starch thrown in for non-veggie good measure. But then, there's is the added tomato paste and spinach powder, which in some contorted, regulatory way, allows this product to be out in the marketplace with the term "veggie" in its name. (Oddly, it's also distributed by no less than the Hain Celestial Group, one of the biggest players in the natural and organic food category.)

Are you really hankering for a healthy snack?

Then here are some simple suggestions for steering clear of scams like the ones mentioned above:

Veggies- the real thing: If it's vegetables you want to snack on, then make it vegetables, not potato-flour chips! Carrots, peppers, celery – all these veggies travel quite well and can be easily prepped at home for any snack bag.

Organic corn and potato chips: At those times when only a chip will do, the organic section of your supermarket is a much better place to look, with plenty of varieties to select from.

Nuts: Cashews, pistachios and almonds are now widely regarded as "health foods." Watch out, however, for ones with flavor-enhancing additives. (Actually, nuts taste great with nothing added other than, perhaps, a bit of sea salt).

Fruits: Apples, bananas and oranges look as if nature designed them just for taking on the road with you.

Homemade goodies: Do you make your own popcorn, cookies, bars or fruit mixes from healthy or organic ingredients? Then make an extra batch to take along with you, and you'll avoid becoming a hungry 'hostage of the highway', buying cheap chips and fake veggie products from convenience stores and rest areas vending machines.

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