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# Four Examples of How You've Been Reading Food Labels All Wrong

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Reading a food package sounds like it should be pretty easy, doesn't it? You simply pick it up and learn about the product that's inside. But there's a war going on in food labeling, a conflict between the words and images that call attention to the package and its actual contents, which manufacturers typically would rather you didn't scrutinize. So they try their best to 'sucker' you in with containers that shout out, in Three Stooges fashion, "Hey, look over here!"

Of course when you shop for "real" food in the produce section or the farmers' market, there is typically no packaging to read — the food sells itself, so to speak. But when you look at what's inside most "food-like substances," as author Michael Pollan (<http://michaelpollan.com>) calls them, you can see why such diversionary packaging is needed.

So what are some of the ways manufacturers entice us into buying products using misleading claims and pictures? Here are a few examples:

## 4C Totally Light Green Tea Mix

**The hook:** antioxidants and 'green tea' itself. Green tea has become a favorite of health-food enthusiasts due to some amazing ingredients called catechins and, in particular, EGCG, that appear to be some of the best things a body can consume to ward off numerous diseases and other ailments.

**The truth:** "antioxidants" is a broad term. The package says each serving contains 70mg of "antioxidants," but it doesn't specify what kind are in this

drink, and whether they come from the EGCG that make green tea so desirable or merely from the vitamin C that has been added in the form of ascorbic acid. And since this product also contains an artificial sweetener, it can hardly be described as a health drink.

**The take-away:** The best information I've yet seen on this subject came from Men's Health magazine ([www.menshealth.com/nutrition/best-green-tea](http://www.menshealth.com/nutrition/best-green-tea)) which had 14 green tea drinks analyzed for total catechin content and found that Honest Tea green tea with honey came in on top with 215 mg of catechins and 71 mg of the powerful antioxidant EGCG.

## Yoplait Greek Frozen Yogurt

**The hook:** Greek yogurt with "2X the protein of regular frozen yogurt."

**The truth:** If you read my blog last week, you're already aware that Greek yogurt is a very controversial item and frozen Greek yogurt even more so. It's possible that frozen yogurt can contain live cultures (the reason we eat yogurt in the first place), but since frozen yogurt can possibly have acidifiers added in the manufacturing process and even undergo heat treatments, it doesn't necessarily contain live and active cultures by the time you consume it.

While the big selling point on this product is that it has twice as much protein as conventional frozen yogurt, a closer look at the fine print reveals the statement that the "protein has been increased from 3.5g to 7g" per serving, but most likely not

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from “real” Greek yogurt, but from “milk protein concentrate,” or MPC. As noted last week, this is an undefined, unregulated ingredient that can come from animals other than cows and is the subject of a current legal action against Yoplait and its parent company General Mills for another one of its so-called “Greek” yogurt products.

**The take-away:** If you are eating yogurt for its health benefits, you’d best stick with a plain, organic variety and dress it up with your own fruit and flavorings.

### True Lemon “Lemon for Your Water”

**The hook:** “100% natural,” “made from lemons.” Water additives are currently all the rage, and this one claims to provide an all-natural way to “flavor the day your way.”

**The truth:** While the box makes a big point about the product beginning “in the grove with fresh lemons selected for their superior taste,” the first ingredient is citric acid, which is almost always derived from corn, not lemons, made using a mold that feeds on corn syrup. The process of making citric acid from corn also produces manufactured glutamic acid (MSG) as well. The product also “contains soy,” which is hardly something you’d expect to find in a lemon grove.

**The take-away:** Most water flavorings contain some undesirable ingredients. If you want more than plain water, it’s not all that difficult to make your own flavored versions – eloquently known as “spa water” – as described here: [www.theyummylife.com/Flavored\\_Water](http://www.theyummylife.com/Flavored_Water)

### Hunt’s Tomatoes Sauce

**The hook:** “100% natural” (with depictions of fresh tomatoes) plus the supposed reliability of a long-established product from a big-name brand.

**The truth:** Tomato sauce should be one of the simplest of all products – made from ripe tomatoes – which is the impression that you might get when

you see a brand like Hunt’s on the shelf. Unfortunately, that’s not often the case. This particular product, is made not from fresh tomatoes, but from “tomato puree” – meaning reconstituted industrial tomato concentrate, along with more citric acid, an ingredient called “tomato fiber,” and unspecified natural flavors. (It’s somewhat revealing that the product name appears to be simply “Hunt’s Sauce,” with the word “TOMATOES” stuck in in a tiny, practically invisible font.)

**The take-away:** While there are a lot of ‘not-so-great’ tomato sauce products out there, you can also find some really good, organic varieties. Watch out for “tomato puree” which is basically reconstituted tomato paste, and don’t let products with that ingredient fool you with pictures of fresh tomatoes, either.

So the answer to how to read a food package is quite simple: rather than focusing on the claims and graphics the manufacturer wants you to see, go right to the ingredient label. And if that appears to be a list of things that don’t sound like food, just put the item back on the shelf and find something made from real ingredients instead.

- *Linda Bonvie, FoodIdentityTheft Blogger and CFH Contributor*

For more information on High Fructose Corn Syrup go to <http://foodidentitytheft.com>

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