Food Serving Sizes Getting a Reality Check

The last time you scooped some ice cream for dessert, did you limit yourself to half a cup? If you took more—say, one cup—you're right in step with most people these days.

Likewise with a soft drink: Do you drink 8 ounces or the whole 20-ounce bottle?

Ice cream and soft drinks are just two food products that would be affected by changes in serving size requirements that are included in the proposed updates to the Nutrition Facts label. The goal: to bring serving sizes closer to what people actually eat so that when they look at calories and nutrients on the label, these numbers more closely match what they are consuming.

The serving sizes listed on the Nutrition Facts label are not recommended serving sizes. By law, serving sizes must be based on how much food people actually consume, and not on what they should eat.

Jillonne Kevala, Ph.D., supervisory chemist at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) says, "The fact is, for many foods, we're eating larger portions than we used to. And the proposed changes to the Nutrition Facts label would reflect that."

In some cases, the reference amounts used to set serving sizes would be smaller. . Today's single serving yogurts more often come in 6-ounce containers, versus the previous 8-ounce ones. FDA is proposing a 6-ounce reference amount for yogurt.

In 1993, when FDA created the Nutrition Facts label, the standards used to determine serving sizes—called the Reference Amounts Customarily Consumed (RACCs)—were based primarily on surveys of food consumption conducted in 1977-1978 and 1987-1988. The RACCs are

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Serving Size Changes

What's considered a single serving has changed in the decades since the original nutrition label was created. So now serving sizes will be more realistic to reflect how much people typically eat at one time.

CURRENT SERVING SIZE

PROPOSED SERVING SIZE

Packaging Affects Servings

Package size affects how much people eat and drink. So now, for example, both 12 *and* 20 ounce bottles will equal 1 serving, since people typically drink both sizes in one sitting.

1 SERVING PER BOTTLE FOR EITHER BOTTLE SIZE

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used by manufacturers to calculate the serving sizes on their packages.

"We now have much more recent food consumption data, and it's showing that some serving sizes on food labels should be changed," says Mary Poos, Ph.D., deputy director of FDA's Office of Nutrition, Labeling and Dietary Supplements. For example, serving sizes for large muffins may change. People generally consume an entire muffin, and not a half or a third.

How Would Changes In Serving Size Affect You?

Let's go back to that ice cream. You may just spoon a cup of ice cream into a dish and assume it's one serving. It's not that much, after all. The label may say a single serving is 200 calories, and that's what you think you've eaten.

If you didn't closely study the Nutrition Facts label beforehand, you wouldn't know that the serving size is actually only half that amount. So you've actually eaten 400 calories.

And that may be your choice, but FDA wants to provide a reality check. The proposed label in this case would list the serving size as one cup and 400 calories. "The proposed label would help people to understand the number of calories and amounts of nutrients they're actually eating," Poos says. And it would more prominently display this information by increasing the type size and placing

in bold type the number of calories and servings per container.

In addition, the proposed label would change "Amount Per Serving" to "Amount Per (Serving Size). Using our ice cream, for example, it would say "Amount Per Cup." This makes the serving size even clearer.

Proposed Changes Based on Package Size

FDA is also proposing to change the criteria for labeling based on package size. "We know that package size affects what people eat," Poos says.

With the new requirements, more food products previously labeled as more than one serving would now be required to be labeled as just one serving because people are more likely to eat or drink them in one sitting. Examples include a 20-ounce can of soda, and a 15-ounce can of soup.

To eliminate confusion, certain larger packages that may be consumed in one sitting or more than one sitting, depending on your appetite and inclination, must be labeled both per serving and per package in the proposed update. Some examples would be: a 24-ounce bottle of soda, a 19-ounce can of soup and a pint of ice cream. Currently, manufacturers are only required to provide the calorie and nutrient information per serving, and you have to do the math if you're eating the whole container.

This dual column format—per serving and per package—would

be required if a package contains at least two times the serving size and less than or equal to four times the serving size.

"For a package more than four times the reference amount, which is used to establish the serving size, the dual column listing would not be required because these packages are larger than most consumers would eat in one sitting," says Poos. Manufacturers would be required to label these products per serving. Examples would be a 12-oz. box of cereal, a 4.5-oz. bag of potato chips, and a 5-oz. bag of cookies.

"We hope that updating the label in these ways would make it easier for people to be more realistic about the number of calories and nutrients they're actually consuming and to make healthier choices when choosing foods for themselves and their families," Poos says.

The proposed changes are available for comment in the Federal Register; visit FDA's official docket at *www.regulations.gov*. **FDA**