



THE PLAIN DEALER

Preparation, packaging affect nutrition labels

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The Vienna bread in the Tops bakery lists ingredients but no nutrition facts. Are they required to provide them, and, if not, is there any way to obtain them?

-- DG, Elyria

The Nutrition Labeling and Education Act of 1990 requires that nutrition labeling be placed on most foods. Nutrition labeling of raw fruits, vegetables and fish is voluntary.

Interpretation of this law for retail establishments is complex enough to warrant 44 pages on the FDA Web site (see accompanying Internet information). There are exemptions for small businesses, for restaurants, for ready-to-eat foods prepared on the premises and for foods sold from bulk containers.

Food that is primarily processed or prepared on-site is exempt where the on-site preparation alters the nutritional profile. Examples would be sandwiches prepared on-site, breads and pastries baked on the premises and cakes baked elsewhere and decorated in the grocery store. Even adding sesame or poppy seeds to bread dough would trigger the exemption, if the additions change the nutrient content.

Also exempt are bulk items that are portioned on-site -- for example, deli items such as salads or sliced or weighed-to-order cheese or deli meats. Bring that meat or cheese out in front of the counter in pre-portioned packages, and nutrition labeling is required.

Thus, items prepared in an in-store bakery or deli would not be required to carry nutrition labeling. However, many of the fresh breads sold in the Tops bakery are not baked on-site. Since last spring, local Tops supermarkets have been buying their Italian, Vienna, French, buttercrust, rye and pumpernickel breads from the Orlando Baking Co. The bread carries the Tops label and is baked using the Tops recipe, says Blanche Romano, bakery manager at the Strongsville store.

Even though the bread is not baked on-site, the exemption from nutrition labeling still would apply, says Kimberly Rawlings, an FDA spokeswoman. So Orlando is not required to label its products with a nutritional profile.

The good news is that nutrition information for the breads is available on request in any Tops bakery. Romano faxed me the nutrition label information for all the Orlando-prepared breads. Each slice of the Vienna bread contains 130 calories, 32 grams of carbohydrate, 5 grams of protein, 1½ grams of fat, 1 gram of fiber and 330 milligrams of sodium.

Ingredient lists for doughnuts, cookies and other bakery items are posted in the store.

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