

Hidden calories in low-fat food

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LOW-FAT, no-fat or 99 per cent fat-free - consumers are being conned into thinking they are making a healthier choice when buying products that make these claims, nutrition experts say.

While the products might have low fat content, many have a lot of sugar.

Kerin O'Dea, from the Sansom Institute for Health Research at the University of South Australia, said processed low-fat foods might be making people fatter.

"Low-fat foods are contributing to obesity," she said. "They get a tick from the Heart Foundation and consumers think they are making a healthy choice.

"However, they often contain the same number of calories - or even more - than their full-fat equivalent. They take the fat out but add flavour with a high sugar content."

Michael Pollan, the American author of best-selling *Food Rules*, said that since Americans started making low-fat foods they had been consuming up to 500 extra calories (2100 kilojoules) a day. A 200-gram tub of low-fat yoghurt can contain more than 30 grams of sugar - which is almost eight teaspoons.

"Consumers have to read labels very carefully," Professor O'Dea said. "They need to look at the overall energy content rather than just the fat content."

Consumer group Choice said packaging made it difficult for people to discern whether a product was healthy.

"There is a considerable difference between the nutritional information on the front of the pack and the nutritional information on the back of the pack," Choice senior policy officer Clare Hughes said. "Food manufacturers will put the more positive information on the front of the pack so their product is seen in a more favourable light.

"At the moment consumers have to look at the nutritional information panel on the back of the pack to get a more accurate picture of its content.

"A low-fat product may very well be low in fat but it could also be very high in sugar. A consumer won't know that unless they look at the panel on the back of the pack."

Stanwell Park mother Susan Saberton said she always read food labels but preferred fresh produce over processed food.

"We eat lots of fresh fruit and vegetables, pulses, legumes and fish," said Mrs Saberton, who works for a catering company.

"I use very little processed food at all because I prefer to make things from scratch and that way you have a much better idea of what you are eating."

She believes the healthy eating habits have been passed on to her two daughters, Ella, 12, and Phoebe, 10, and will stay with them for life.

Source: [The Sydney Morning Herald](#)