

## Current food allergy labelling can still be improved

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Consumers with allergies do not find current food labels helpful, according to a study published by Dutch scientists.

Recent changes in European food safety legislation, requiring the traceability and labelling of 12 groups of potential food allergens, prompted the scientists to evaluate whether current food labels are helpful to consumers with allergies. A sample of forty Dutch and Greek consumers with allergies to milk, eggs, and/or peanuts or tree nuts were recruited and then observed while they shopped for a standard list of 15 food and beverage products. The products were specially selected to be potentially problematic in terms of the subjects' allergies. Questionnaires about the specific problems they experienced were completed after the shopping trips.

The results showed that the subjects reported a number of issues with the legibility of labels (e.g. font size, contrast). Not all packaging contained relevant allergy information and, in many cases, the ingredients lists were insufficiently detailed. Dutch subjects reported being frustrated about the frequent recipe changes of popular products. The use of multiple languages on the labels and "information overload" were also reported to be problematic, making it difficult for the allergy sufferers to find the relevant information. In real life, subjects said they tended to shop for products that they had eaten previously, as they felt insecure about trying new products.

The authors concluded that food-allergic consumers were not satisfied with the information given on current labels. Unclear labels resulted in feelings of stress and insecurity.

For more information, see

Cornelisse-Vermaat JR et al (2007). Food-allergic consumers' labelling preferences: a cross-cultural comparison. *European Journal of Public Health*, Jun 21; [Epub ahead of print]