

Media Release

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Cancer Council commends change to food labelling system

Australians will be able to make more informed choices when selecting packaged foods and drinks, thanks to an improvement to the Health Star Rating food label system announced by all Australian and New Zealand governments.

The change will mean that foods will only receive a star rating based on the product “as sold”, or with added water or drained – rather than “as prepared”.

Chair of Cancer Council Australia’s Nutrition and Physical Activity Committee, Steve Pratt, welcomed the change and said it would provide clearer choices for consumers and eliminate a loophole allowing food companies to inflate their products’ health ratings.

“Under the current system, the labelling of products high in sugar such as some breakfast cereals and powdered drinks that are mixed with milk can make them look like healthy choices, when they’re not,” Mr Pratt said.

“It enables some food companies to game the system, to maximise the number of stars by making assumptions about the amount and type of milk added by the consumer. This can be misleading and makes it harder for consumers to make an informed choice.

“We welcome the closing of this loophole by all governments in Australia and New Zealand. It’s an important step in improving the Health Star Rating system, on the road to what we hope will be its mandatory application to assist consumers.”

Mr Pratt said the combined effect of poor nutrition, high body mass and physical inactivity was the second leading risk factor for cancer death in Australia after smoking.

“People need clear advice to guide their choices and to reduce their risk of a cancer related to dietary factors,” he said. “A choice is only as good as the information that guides it.”

The changes to the system are expected to take effect in 2019.

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