

SECRETS THE FOOD INDUSTRY DOESN'T WANT YOU TO KNOW

Recently, a book was published entitled, "Eat This, Not That," by David Zinczenko. It's an excellent text to become a more knowledgeable food purchaser and consumer. ***One chapter offered insight into the truth about the products that line the supermarket shelves and an inside look at the food industry itself. I feel most individuals would find the information in this chapter quite surprising.***

However, here are some tips you can put to use now.

Just walking through the grocery store's candy aisle offers you a case in point. There, on the labels of some products, you will find what perhaps is a surprising claim; "fat free." However, it's a completely true statement. These empty-calorie junk foods are almost 100 percent sugar and processed carbohydrates and are "fat free." It's shocking when we realize that food manufacturers assume that as consumers, we are fairly gullible. In fact, food marketing strategies predominantly rely on this. ***It's working, because through persistent marketing, we equate "fat free" with "healthy" or "non-fattening" and thus, we forget about all the sugar in these products. Subsequently, they end up in our grocery carts.***

Fat free alone doesn't mean that a product is healthy and certainly in the aforementioned example, it's far from healthy when the product you are purchasing is predominantly 100 percent sugar. Yet, this classic form of marketing is used with a variety of products. Thus, we must read and understand ingredients and not be lulled into the false sense of security by the fancy packaging and marketing ploys of the food manufacturers. The candy aisle itself is only the beginning. When we become more conscientious label readers and better consumers we are better able to avoid manufacturer's marketing ploys which again are not false in their claims; just very tactful and misleading.

Advertised numbers on a product box can be quite deceiving. One example is that of a box of reduced, fat free Club crackers where, in large, yellow letters, you can find the claim, "33 percent less fat than the original Club crackers." The math is accurate; the original product contains 3 grams of fat per serving while the reduced fat version has 2 grams per serving so statistically, it's a 33 percent difference. But is that truly meaningful and why doesn't the manufacturer explain that their reduced fat crackers have 33 percent more carbohydrates than the original? ***Probably because they don't want us to realize that when they took out the 1 gram of fat, they replaced it with 3 grams of refined flour and sugar.*** Not necessarily a healthy trade. However, if we are stimulated by the scare of high cholesterol and triglycerides, we'll tend to purchase products containing less fat. But it certainly doesn't mean that it is a healthier product or that it is healthier for us.

A similar example is that of a container of Salt Sense which states on the front that it has 33 percent less sodium per teaspoon. Most individuals, because of the rate of cardiovascular disease in this country, are attempting to reduce their salt intake; thus, 33 percent less sodium per teaspoon sounds like a good deal. But if you are a label reader, you will learn that in the ingredients there is salt (that's a good thing), tri-calcium phosphate (that's like putting rice in your salt shaker so it doesn't clog) and silicon dioxide. The chemical compound silicon dioxide is also known as silica which is an oxide of silicon. Silica is commonly found in nature as sand. So, the statement that there is 33 percent less sodium per teaspoon in this container of salt is a factual statement. The other fact is that one-third of this container is now white sand. I am confident that all of us don't need to increase our quota of sand consumption; yet, purchasing this container of salt would do so. Realize, the numbers by themselves can be deceiving.

What about bottled green teas? They may not be as healthy as you think. Many of the green teas do in fact have high levels of disease-fighting catechins. They range from 215 milligrams down to one green tea which only has 8 milligrams; yet on the label, it indicates that it's packed with antioxidants. True, there are some antioxidants in there; but an aware consumer will realize that the labeling can be misleading.

Marketing of cornflakes is another topic to discuss. Cornflakes have a "diabetes friendly" logo on the box side. High blood glucose is a primary characteristic of diabetes. One might assume that diabetes friendly would indicate that it's not going to raise your glucose. Yet, Australian researchers have shown that cornflakes raise blood glucose faster and to a greater extent than straight table sugar; and yet, the cereal maker provides a link to its website where nutritional recommendations are provided for people with diabetes.

Now let's look at the so-called, "heart healthy" labeled hot cereals. Some of these have more sugar than the same serving size of Fruit Loops. Quaker maple and brown sugar instant oatmeal proudly displays the American Heart Association (AHA) checkmark on the product's box. However, the fine print next to the logo reads that the food simply meets AHA's "food criteria for saturated fat and cholesterol." So in reality, it could have a pound of sugar and still qualify. Now guess what? Fruit Loops also meets the AHA's criteria only no logo is displayed. Why does one product have the AHA checkmark and the other does not? Cardiovascular disease is an ever-increasing problem in this country. A subtle way of marketing a product, even though it's extraordinarily high in sugar content, is to label it, "heart healthy." What happens when these products are labeled in this fashion? We buy them! The food industry doesn't want you to know that companies must pay to be an American Heart Association certified food. This is another reason why the AHA's logo might appear on some products, but is absent from others -- even when both meet the guidelines just as our previous example offered.

Food additives run the gamut of some having a nutritional value (inulin) to those that are absolutely scary in their implications on human health. A recent study at the University of South Hampton in the U.K. showed that artificial food colorings and sodium benzoate preservatives are directly related to increased hyperactivity in children. Additives included: yellow #5, yellow #6, red #40 and sodium benzoate which are commonly found in supermarket packaged foods throughout the U.S. What researchers don't know is if it is a combination of the chemical additives or if there is a single one that's the primary culprit. However, when you look into various breakfast cereals, diet sodas, pickles and jellies you will see a many of these food colorings. ***If there was a label on products that had these food additives stating, "May make your kids misbehave," would we put it in our grocery cart? Probably not!***

The meat industry has learned that people are more aware of their degree of fat intake. Thus, leaner cuts of meat have become more marketable. However, leaner cuts of meat by definition are also less juicy. To counteract this dried-out effect, some manufacturers "enhance" turkey, chicken and beef products by pumping them full of a liquid solution that contains water, salt and other flavor enhancers. ***This practice can dramatically boost a meat's sodium level.*** These meats will be marketed as "less fat;" however, they will not market the fact that markedly more salt has been added.

A very interesting secret of the food industry is that if we were stuck in a long checkout line, we will be up to 25 percent more likely to buy the candy and sodas that are around us. This is according to a recent study at the University of Arizona. Psychologists have found that the more exposure someone has to temptation, the more likely it is that they'll succumb to it. So why are supermarkets planned in such a way that the common staples many of us need on a regular basis such as milk, bread and eggs are at the very back -- forcing us to pass through multiple isles of tempting, colorful packages? One way to avoid succumbing to temptation is to stick closely to your grocery list which was created from your weekly meal plan (no grocery list tests the greatest willpower of all conscientious shoppers and avoids the, "how did that get in my grocery cart" statement at the checkout line). Avoid the long checkout lines and instead use the self checkout line that usually goes fairly quickly and, because you are busy, keeps you from gazing at the temptations around you.

With an increased awareness, you can learn to disarm the food industry's marketing expertise and avoid the products that are detrimental to your health. Is it really worth all the effort? I believe your future health depends on it. Improving your health and losing weight is all about choices. We recommend you choose wisely. Our "Healthy Life by Design" program is based upon awareness, education, guidance and support and is a life altering good choice that you can make today. Call 740-687-0279 to get started.

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