



Press Release

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Members of European Parliament Discuss Food labelling and Heart Health

Members of the European Parliament Heart Group meet today, 3 June, in Brussels, to discuss the link between nutrition and cardiovascular diseases and how labelling of food can help people choose products that are better for their hearts and vessels. The European Commission has already made the declaration of the amount of energy, fat, sugars, salt and saturates on food packaging mandatory. Nevertheless, there is no European legislation harmonising diverse national schemes. Consumers often find nutrition labelling confusing and sometimes even misleading.

"Given the alarming rate at which obesity is progressing, especially among children, bringing with it other health related problems such as diabetes, hypertension and heart disease, it seems necessary to insist on giving consumers clear and understandable information in order to help them make better informed dietary choices," explained Prof Pedro Marques, Spokesperson for the European Association of Cardiovascular Prevention and Rehabilitation (EACPR), a registered body of the European Society of Cardiology (ESC), and speaker at today's MEP Heart Group meeting.

"Front of pack labelling should allow consumers to know at a glance whether a product contributes to their health or not", says Susanne Logstrup, director of the European Heart Network. "To achieve this, simplified front of pack labelling of four key nutrients, energy, saturated/trans fats, sugars and salt, must be presented in an easy to understand way. Based on work carried out particularly in the UK, EHN believes that a scheme whereby the quantity of these nutrients are highlighted with a multiple colour coding ('traffic lights'), indicating clearly whether a product contains high, low or medium levels of them, is the best". EHN calls upon MEPs to improve the Commission proposal and put colour coding on mandatory front of pack in the Commission proposal and introduce mandatory back of pack labelling of the 'big eight' (energy, protein, carbohydrate, sugars, fibre, fat, saturated fat, trans fat and salt).



"There are many issues for the MEP Heart Group to consider", explains Dr Adamou, MEP.

"Consumers demand and people need better information on labels; information that is clear, simple, comprehensive, and standardised. As Co-chair of the MEP Heart Group, I want labels that really make a difference. It would be useful to have mandatory front of pack signposting of four key nutrients that are colour coded."

"Prevention experts of the ESC believe that the UK 'traffic light' system is an effective idea and should be supported at a European level" states Dr Simona Giampaoli, Chair of the Prevention and Health policy section of the EACPR.

The traffic light system helps consumers see at a glance whether the contents of a certain product are within a healthy limit. Food with a green light is the healthiest option and a red light warns that this product should not be eaten regularly.

"As health professionals, we, at the ESC, clearly see the need to adopt clear information in the front of food packages. We also need to educate consumers on the adequate amounts of sugar, salt and fat intake as well as healthy portion sizes," explains Prof William Wijns, spokesperson for the European society of Cardiology . "Obesity is being recognised as a growing and dangerous disease with a high cost on public health systems. It is urgent to achieve a harmonised common policy on labelling as soon as possible as part of a larger effort to raise awareness on the effects of unhealthy eating habits on our bodies and especially their link to increased risk of cardiovascular disease."

Cardiovascular disease is the number 1 killer in Europe, accounting for 4.3 million deaths and costing the EU over 192 billion Euros each year.

The main objective of the MEP Heart Group is to promote measures that will help reduce the burden of CVD in the European Union and to raise awareness of the disease amongst target audiences through a series of dedicated activities. The MEP Heart Group is led by two Co-Chairs, Georgs Andrejevs MEP and Adamos Adamou MEP. The European Heart Network and the European Society of Cardiology ensure the support of the MEP Heart Group

MEP Heart Group see: http://www.escardio.org/initiatives/European_Affairs/MEP_Group/ and <http://www.ehnheart.org/content/itemstory.asp?level0=2133&level1=2134>

The European Society of Cardiology (ESC) represents more than 50,000 cardiology professionals across Europe and the Mediterranean. The ESC comprises 4 Councils for Cardiology Practice, 5 Associations, 19 Working Groups and 50 National Cardiac Societies Its mission is to reduce the burden of cardiovascular disease in Europe, see: www.escardio.org

The European Heart Network (EHN) is a Brussels-based alliance of heart foundations and other concerned non-governmental organisations throughout Europe. EHN has 31 members in 26 countries. The European Heart Network plays a leading role in the prevention and reduction of cardiovascular disease through advocacy, networking and education so that it is no longer a major cause of premature death and disability throughout Europe, see: www.ehnheart.org

The European Association for Cardiovascular Prevention & Rehabilitation (EACPR) aims to promote excellence in research, practice, education and policy in cardiovascular prevention and rehabilitation in Europe, see: www.escardio.org/bodies/associations/EACPR/