

Truth in labelling submission

I am a mother of 4 highly allergic young adults. I have battled with accurate food labelling since they were very young and feel that I am in a good position to talk about what should be on a label.

Our children were all born with severe reflux, 2 were projectile. Our first one was born with 14 ulcers in his stomach and his oesophagus wasn't closing. He was allergic to any artificial colours and flavours, alcohol, the fumes from petrol, diesel and LP gas. He was diagnosed with ADD, but we found that as long as we kept him away from the things that he was allergic to, he was bearable. He had asthma, and we found anything with msg in it seemed to set him off. He also got lead and arsenic poisoning from playing in the dirt, he had very little immune system.

Our next child was not as bad with refluxing she did not project as much. She had febrile convulsions, she is also hypoglycaemic, her sugar level must be kept low and she has to eat every 2 hours, she is intolerant to wheat, gluten, yeast and cannot have much fruit. She is also allergic to artificial colours and flavours.

Our next child was a bit worse with her reflux, she did not project, instead she would choke and go blue. She had severe eczema, and was allergic to all citric fruit and their products and petroleum based products. She gets hay fever from all highly smelling products.

Our last child was a severe reflux who was projectile. He caught septic arthritis when he was 2, his immune system was damaged and he developed allergies to antibiotics, xylocaine, alcohol, artificial colour and flavours as well as any red natural flavours, he was also born with an ulcer in his stomach and a hernia and he is hypoglycaemic.

I am intimately aware of the problems that happen when someone is given a food they are allergic to (the hospital knew us quite well).

I know how important it is to understand what is actually in the food that you buy. Some foods do not have the number for the artificial colouring and flavourings listed, some have it listed as a name known only in the country of origin and some don't even specify at all. It is really difficult and time consuming to have to read every label in the shop, but I have to do it each time just in case they suddenly start to add something extra to the product. I try to buy things grown and made in Australia as I believe in supporting our own country as well as I find it easier to decipher the ingredients in them. We have strict laws on what can and can't be sprayed/used on our food and for people like us, this is really essential.

I would like to see, on the front bottom left hand corner of all products, the country of origin, so then we are not searching all over the packet for it. And only Australian owned products should have our flag on it. If it is partly owned by Australians then the percentage would be good. All ingredients should have the common names they are known by, so that nothing can be hidden in the ingredients eg. extra sugar is cannot be hidden in there by another name.

All imported foods must meet the same health regulations as our food and they must have a full list of ingredients – what we know them by in Australia.

I am very frustrated at the moment as it takes so long to locate the country of origin and then to find and decipher the ingredients. I know that I am not university educated, but neither are most of the other grocery shoppers, and we should not be discriminated against with the scientific names used in the ingredient list – if it is sugar then list is as sugar.

Regards Karen and Darryl Smith