

It's a wrap. Chocolate bars, health, and ethical practice

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I bought a Kit Kat chocolate bar the other day. Its wrapper was crowded with information for the consumer.

On the front of its wrapper prominently displayed is the phrase 'Have a break, Ask RU OK?' with the web address ruok.org.au a suicide prevention organisation.

Special Release KitKat 4 Finger Milk 45g with R U OK?

Taking the time to have a break and check in with someone can have more of an impact than you might think.

KitKat has partnered with R U OK? to contribute towards their mission to inspire and empower everyone to meaningfully connect with friends, family and colleagues who might be struggling with life.

Kit Kat here adapted its slogan 'Let's take a break'.

On the back of the wrapper consumers are advised to 'Be Treatwise. Enjoy a balanced diet' with a web address for information on how to be so. Also on the back of the wrapper is a Nutrition Information panel. Recyclability is promoted with the web address to arl.org.au with an interactive tool through which consumers can check for local recyclability options for their wrappers. Finally, again on the back of the wrapper is an accreditation symbol from the Rainforest Alliance.

I wondered whether other chocolate bars have the same or similar information for the consumer.

I bought 10 chocolate bars including the Kit Kat to investigate.

- Aero
- Boost
- Bounty
- Caramello
- Cherry Ripe
- Chokito
- Crunchie
- Kit Kat
- Maltesers Bar
- Mars Bar

Aero, Chockito, and Kit Kat are all Nestle products. Boost, Caramello and Crunchy are Cadbury products. Each wrapper of these is distinct enough to treat them as individual bars.

What follows is by way of a commentary on the information for the consumer and its usefulness.

As an overall comment, the usefulness of information on the wrapper depends on two things:

- That the consumer reads the wrapper.
- That the consumer has access to technology necessary to investigate further.

Recyclability of the wrapper

The Australasian Recycling Label (ARL) is a system in Australia and New Zealand ‘that provides consumers with easy-to-understand recycling information on packaging ... that removes confusion, saves time and reduces contamination in the recycling stream.’ It uses symbols that identify the specific packaging component the label on a product refers to and its recycling options. There are four of these; recyclable, conditionally recyclable, not recyclable, and check locally each of which has a symbol on the wrapper of the chocolate bar.

Of the chocolate bars reviewed here Aero, Bounty, Chokito, Kit Kat, Mars Bar, and Maltesers are labelled as Check Locally. In this category the ARL site has an interactive tool in which a product’s packaging can be entered with a specific locality to check local options for recyclability.

Boost, Caramello and Cherry Ripe ask consumers to dispose of the wrapper ‘thoughtfully’ and have QR codes for where information on disposal can be found.

Aero is ‘wrapped with a minimum 70% recycled plastic’. The Mars Bar has a ‘paper-based wrapper’. Both wrappers also direct the consumer to the ARL for information on local recyclability.

Crunch has no information or advice on recycling the wrapper.

Comment:

Here the consumer is being tasked with the responsibility of determining the recyclability of the product through a few steps and of disposing the wrapper appropriately. This lets the producer off the hook for making their wrapping easily disposable. The Mars Bar with its paper-based wrapping shows that the producer can do this

Rainforest Alliance

The Rainforest Alliance certifies crops that are environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable. Growers can seek Certification of their crop at two levels: Sustainable Agriculture (SAS) and Regenerative Agriculture (RAS).

Food producers can source ingredients from growers with one or other of the two certificates or both these certificates. When they do, they can identify that they do so on their labelling. Of the 10 chocolate bars reviewed 4 display the SAS certification symbol (a frog) on their wrapper. They identify the cocoa they use as being of benefit to the growers - Aero, Boost, Chokito, Kit Kat and Mars Bar.

Comment:

That just four have been certified by the Rainforest Alliance is disappointing.

Nutrition Information

Nutrition Information panels are compulsory under the Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ). Also on the wrapper of each is a Nutrition Information panel which records how many kilojoules of energy the various ingredients in the bar provide per single serving. Not all bars are a single serving. Bounty has two.

This is the Nutrition Information for an Aero

	Avg QTY per serving	% Daily Intake	Average QTY per 100g
Energy	910kj	10%	2280kj
Protein	3.0kj	6%	74g
Fat total	12.9g	18%	32.4kj
Saturated fats	77g	32%	192g
Carbohydrates	22.1	21.8	55.2g
Sugars	21.8g	24%	54.6g
Sodium	28mg	1%	70mg

Comment

To understand the Nutrition Information panel the consumer needs some guidance as to what the figures mean. There is none on the wrappers. Consumers will have to go to a site like *be treatwise* to figure this all out.

Be treatwise[®]

Established in 2006, *Be treatwise*[®] is

a confectionery industry initiative designed to provide consumers with information to help explain the place that confectionery has, as a treat food, that can be enjoyed as part of a balanced diet and active lifestyle.

Be treatwise[®] is a voluntary and proactive commitment from the Australian confectionery industry to help address concerns about nutrition awareness and impact of over consumption on people's health and wellbeing. The confectionery industry is confident *Be treatwise*[®] helps to influence consumer behaviour and consumption of products.

The Ai Group and the Confectionery Trust believe that self-regulation and taking responsible steps through participating in programs such as this, with the Health Star Rating (HSR) System or Daily Intake Guide, will benefit the consumer.

It's not unexpected that the industry should push for voluntary self-regulation. The Health Star Rating (HSR) is also a voluntary system with little to no oversight by Commonwealth regulators.

For consumers the site directs them to the Health Star Rating (HSR) System, Daily Intake Guide and the Australian Dietary Guidelines. It also gives basic information on Understanding Energy, Understanding Sugar Fat and Salt and about Exercise. The information says how many kilojoules the average person needs per day.

Its basic message is:

Being balanced is all about our food choices firstly and balancing food intake according to our individual needs which takes into account our activity levels.

Bounty, Caramello, Cherry Ripe, Chokita, Kit Kat, Maltesers, Mars Bar, all had *be treatwise* printed on the wrapper. None of these had it on the front of the wrapper as is the intention.

Comment

I have a large concern here.

In recent years health concerns have been raised of ultraprocessed foods.

‘They are designed to be hyper-palatable, convenient, attractive, and highly profitable, often replacing healthy prepared foods. ... The hallmark of ultra processed foods is the presence of ingredients you would not find in a residential kitchen. These include high fructose corn syrup, hydrogenated or interesterified oils, protein isolates (soy protein isolates, whey protein concentrate), emulsifiers (soy lecithin, carrageenan, mono- and diglycerides), flavour enhancers (monosodium glutamate, artificial flavours), colourings (Red 40, Yellow 5, caramel colour), and non-sugar sweeteners (aspartame, sucralose, acesulfame), potassium.’¹

Chocolate bars are ultraprocessed foods. The list of ingredients of a Kit Kat, for example, are:

Sugar, vegetable fat, emulsifier, soy lecithin, full cream milk powder, wheat flour, more emulsifiers, cocoa, raising agent, sodium bicarbonate, salt, yeast, whey powder, white chocolate, wafer fingers, Rainforest Alliance Certified cocoa.

Ultraprocessed foods are linked to life-shortening illnesses.

It is rare for people to drop dead holding the incriminating packaging, but there is no longer any serious doubt that consuming a diet of ultra-processed foods (UPFs) risks a catalogue of life-shortening illnesses from heart disease and stroke to diabetes and cancer. Because these diseases are degenerative over time, the food and drink industry has been able to argue for decades that its UPFs are fine in moderation. It would have us believe that there is no such thing as a “junk” individual food, only poor diets overall, and that its products therefore should not be subject to any restrictions.²

Concluding remark

I looked at the messaging on wrappers from 10 chocolate bars. Recyclability put the onus on the consumer to recycle appropriately without the chocolate manufacturer adopting good practice recyclability at their end on the material the wrapper is made of. It was disappointing that only four of the wrappers demonstrated ethical practice in sourcing ingredients. Programs like Be treatwise® put the onus on the consumer to act healthwise without chocolate bar manufacturers making changes to the composition of the chocolate bars themselves to make them healthier.

¹ NOVA Food Classification System Explained, Ultra Processed Food List

² Lawrence, Felicity, Why are ultra-processed food firms panicking and suing? Because they know time is running out, The Guardian, 78 August 2026