



# Food Fortification in Canada

## Updating the Policy

### Rationale for updating Canada's food fortification policy

In 1998, Canada began a review of its food fortification policy. The review responded to concerns that the current policy and practices are too restrictive and that they limit the development of new products, as well as Canadians' access to fortified foods available in other countries. Health Canada responded by revisiting the underlying reasons that guide current food fortification regulations, reviewing the latest scientific information, and by consulting extensively with stakeholders (including consumer groups, the food and beverage industry, the public health sector, academia and other levels of government).

### The proposed new policy

The proposed policy is outlined in the document, *Addition of Vitamins and Minerals to Food, 2005: Health Canada's Proposed Policy and Implementation Plans*. It would retain current fortification practices to prevent and correct nutritional problems, such as requiring the addition of Vitamin D to milk to combat the childhood disease of rickets and the addition of folic acid to flour to reduce birth defects. Fortifying foods to restore vitamins and minerals lost through processing would also continue. The policy would create a new provision for food fortification done at the "discretion" or "choice" of the manufacturer (within defined limits set by Health Canada) to meet a market demand, a process known as discretionary fortification.

The policy also calls for an expansion of the product category of special purpose foods.

### What does this mean for Canadians?

We anticipate that, when manufacturers fortify their products (within the safe limits set by Health Canada), the nutrients available in our food supply will increase. Canadians would enjoy the freedom to make choices from a wider range and variety of fortified foods while knowing that they have been protected from the health hazards of consuming too much of a given nutrient.

Certain standardized and staple foods which are pervasive in the food supply would be excluded from regulated discretionary fortification to guard against excessive nutrient intakes. Examples include flour, bread, pasta, rice, milk, butter, sugar, and salt. (Note, some of the foods are already fortified under specific regulatory requirements.) Fresh fruits and vegetables, eggs, nuts, fresh meat, fish, and poultry, would also be excluded from regulated discretionary fortification because these foods already are good sources of one or more nutrients naturally occurring. Research also shows that consumers want a choice of unfortified foods, including those that are already healthy.



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The levels of vitamins and minerals proposed within the new category of discretionary fortification are such that manufacturers will be able to indicate which of their products are “a source”, or “a good source ” or an “excellent source” of particular nutrients. Any food subject to discretionary fortification would have to display the new Nutrition Facts table that shows not only such nutrients such as Vitamins A and C, calcium, and iron, but also Calories, the amount of fat, saturated and trans fats, cholesterol, sodium, carbohydrate, fiber, sugars, and protein, in a specified amount of food. This will help consumers to make healthy food choices. (For more information on the nutrition labelling regulations visit [www.healthcanada.ca/nutritionlabelling](http://www.healthcanada.ca/nutritionlabelling)). Health Canada continues to advocate that Canadians meet their dietary needs by choosing a variety of foods consistent with Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating.

### Health and safety are the first priority

Protecting the health of Canadians is Health Canada's first priority when making decisions about food fortification as it is indeed possible to get too much of some nutrients. This is why the proposed policy would set specific limits on what nutrients can be added to food, how much of an individual vitamin or mineral can be added, and which foods can not be fortified at the discretion of manufacturer.

In determining the appropriate level to which nutrients can be added to foods, the proposed policy uses an evidence-based statistical modelling approach using actual food and nutrient intake data from several provincial surveys and a new, internationally accepted, scientific reference value, the Tolerable Upper Intake Level (UL) to determine the safe limits for vitamins and minerals.

### Next steps

With the completion of the policy review, Health Canada will draft regulations to implement the policy. The public will have a chance to review and comment on these draft regulations when they are published in Canada Gazette Part I, prior to their becoming law when they are published in Canada Gazette Part II. This regulatory process usually takes about 12-18 months.