

The Claim Game: Understanding the 3 Types of FDA Regulated Claims

The FDA recognizes three main types of claims: nutrient content, structure / function, and health claims. Regardless of the type, the claim should be truthful, not misleading, and supported by adequate substantiation.



Nutrient Content

Describes the amount or level of a nutrient in a product

Key points:

- Can include description of
 - Nutrient amounts (g of X, “free” / “low”) or source of (based on % Daily Value (DV))
 - How a product differs from a similar product based on the nutrient content
- If a product making a nutrient content claim contains high levels of nutrients to limit (e.g., saturated fat, sodium), it must include disclosure statements to avoid misleading consumers

Examples:

- Good source of vitamin C
- Low-fat / fat-free
- Lower sugar - 1/2 the sugar of original soda



Structure / Function

Describes the effect a nutrient or ingredient has on the normal structure and/or function of the body

Key points:

- Normal structure/function of the body derived from the benefit of a nutrient
- No reference to preventing / reducing a disease or health condition
- FDA does not review or pre-approve these claims - it is the responsibility of manufacturers to ensure accuracy, truthfulness, and adequate scientific substantiation

Examples:

- Fiber to help support a healthy digestive system
- Vitamin C & zinc for immune support



Health

Describes relationship between a food substance (e.g. food component, nutrient, ingredient) & the risk of a disease or health condition.

Key points:

- Must undergo FDA review prior to use. Once authorized, only specific preapproved language can be used.
- Claims need to be supported by significant scientific evidence and agreement across numerous studies and qualified experts.
- Very few US approved health claims

Example:

- “3g of soluble fiber from oatmeal daily in a diet low in saturated fat and cholesterol may reduce the risk of heart disease. This cereal has two grams per serving.”

References:

1. Label Claims for Conventional Foods and Dietary Supplements. United States Food & Drug Administration. Updated Mar 28, 2024. Accessed Oct 16, 2025. <https://www.fda.gov/food/nutrition-food-labeling-and-critical-foods/label-claims-conventional-foods-and-dietary-supplements>
2. PART 101—FOOD LABELING, 21 CFR. § 101.1. Updated Jan 8, 2025. Accessed Jan 10, 2025. <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-21/chapter-I/subchapter-B/part-101>