

# give yourself a

Heart disease is one of our biggest health challenges, and prevention is better than cure. *Australian Table* Nutrition Editor Catherine Saxelby interviews the manager of the Heart Foundation's Tick Program, which helps consumers make heart-healthy food choices at the supermarket

Susan Anderson (pictured opposite), an accredited practising dietitian with a Masters degree in Public Health, is the national manager for the Heart Foundation's Tick Program. Since 2000, she's been on a mission to make supermarket products healthier for your heart by working with manufacturers on their ingredients, formulations, packaging, labelling and advertising. Here she gives Catherine the low-down on the Tick:

## **[Q] How do companies get the Tick, and what does a product with the Tick mean?**

We don't just hand over the Tick. Food must meet our strict nutrition standards

for saturated fat (the bad fat), salt, kilojoules and fibre, but it depends on which food you're talking about. For example, we test convenience dinners for their saturated fat, salt and fibre and how much vegetable content they have, but oils are only tested for the type of fat. We know oils have virtually no salt, no fibre and all have around the same total fat, so it's only whether they are polyunsaturated, monounsaturated or saturated that we need to analyse. Often companies have to go away and reformulate their product, retest it and even purchase new equipment in order to meet our standards.

## **[Q] How much do companies have to pay for placing the Tick on their products?**

We charge companies a license fee once their foods meet our standards. They pay a small percentage of their sales to us.

More than half the companies in the Tick Program pay only the minimum fee of \$3000, plus GST. They must comply with their own labelling and advertising, and we spot check them during the year.

## **[Q] How do you use fees you receive from companies?**

Those fees go towards testing the products. For example, three times a year we go into supermarkets anonymously and purchase Tick foods off the shelf, which are then analysed by an independent lab as a check. We also use the funds for education and advertising to let consumers know what's in the supermarket. We also fund research. Last year we funded two nutrition researchers at Deakin University in Victoria to study how we can prevent weight gain in younger women, especially after having a baby, and how physical activity keeps you

Photos: Getty Images; ACP Library; Juli Balla; Michael Onnm

## **Tick for two**

**Last year, two unusual products were awarded the Tick. Here's why:**

### **Eggs**

Until recently, eggs had an image problem. Despite being incredibly nutritious and affordable, the cholesterol they contain made them one of the most misunderstood foods. Today the role of dietary cholesterol is better understood, as we now know that

cholesterol in food (such as in eggs and prawns) is not the same as cholesterol in the body (which results from eating too many foods high in saturated fat). So now eggs have the Tick to show they are low in both saturated fat and kilojoules.

### **Meat pies**

"It's not possible to make a pie with less fat" was the standard response when piemaker Four 'N Twenty talked to the



# tick



from putting on weight. Their results will be used to plan health programs run by the Government. The Heart Foundation is a charity which is not government funded, so the Tick program needs to pay for itself and cover its costs.

## [Q] Are Tick foods the best choice for my family?

Tick foods are not always the perfect food as far as a nutritionist is concerned but, relative to what else is out there, they are better for you. Say with salt, many types of bread carry our Tick logo because they are high in fibre and have less salt than the regular brands. They may not be as low as nutritionists would like, but we're changing people's tastebuds gradually in a way that won't affect the taste of the product. Most of us would find salt-free bread unpalatable, but would hardly notice the drop in salt in a



Tick bread. While we've been badgering manufacturers to reduce salt, we've found we are having a big impact on the food supply. For instance, when one breakfast cereal company used the Tick criteria as a benchmark to reformulate 12 of their cereals, 235 tonnes of salt were removed from the food supply in one year. We're now working on other salt replacers so we can get that salt intake down even more.

For more information call  
Heartline on 1300 362 787 or  
visit [www.thetick.com.au](http://www.thetick.com.au)

Heart Foundation. They could reduce the fat in the filling, but the pastry was a real barrier – it needed proper baking fat to make crispy flakes on the top and not leak. But in collaboration with food company Unilever, Four'N Twenty created a new pastry that has half the saturated fat, one-third of the kilojoules and is free of trans fats, another “bad” fat. It doesn't mean that it's healthy, but there's now a better choice if you feel like tucking into a pie.



## health

## Reading a food label

The nutrition panel on food products has two sets of information – the nutrition analysis per serve and per 100 grams. When you're checking the per serve analysis consider the portion you would realistically eat at one time, not the manufacturer's recommended portion. That way you can more accurately assess the product for you. Here's what to look out for when you're shopping:

**Low fat** To qualify, the product must contain less than 3% fat for foods or 1.5% for liquids.

**Light** The term “light” or “lite” doesn't necessarily mean that the product is low in fat or kilojoules. Light could refer to the texture, colour or taste of the product. The characteristic being lightened must be stated on the label. For example:

- light potato crisps are thinly sliced and lightly salted (but may still have as much fat as normal crisps).

- light beer is low in alcohol.

- light olive oil is light in flavour and colour (it's usually less than 15% virgin olive oil) but contains the same fat and kilojoules as other oils.

- light cheese has less fat and salt.

- light margarine (spread) has less fat.

**97% fat-free** This really means that the food contains 3% fat, but saying it the other way around makes it sound better for you. Only low-fat foods with 3% fat or less can make this claim, and it also applies to 98% fat-free and 99% fat-free foods.

**No cholesterol** This does not mean *no fat*. Many foods such as oils, margarines, nuts, avocado and snack foods can be free of cholesterol but remain high in fat. All plant-derived products are free of cholesterol anyway. It's more important to cut back on saturated fat than cholesterol.

**Baked not fried** This appears on snack foods and implies that the food is low in fat. For some snacks, like pretzels, this is true (i.e. they have less than 3% fat) but for others, like biscuit snacks, it means they are lower in fat (around 25% less) but not necessarily low in fat. They could still have as much fat as fried items. 