Misleading Food Label Claims: A Detailed Guide

Find if the claims are valid based on the ingredient list

#### 1. Claim: All natural / 100% natural / Made with real ingredients

Why Misleading:  
A food product can legally use the term “natural” if it does not contain added colors, flavors, or artificial substances and goes through minimal processing. However, this term is often used loosely. Manufacturers may highlight just one or two natural ingredients, even if the rest are synthetic or heavily processed. For example, “all-natural” or “pure” honey may still contain added sugar or preservatives.

<https://healthviewsonline.com/top-25-misleading-food-label-claims-in-india-a-comprehensive-guide/>

#### 2. Claim: Real fruit or fruit juice

Why Misleading:  
FSSAI regulations allow the term "real fruit" even if the product contains as little as 10% fruit content. These products may include added sugar and other additives, misleading consumers into thinking they are getting a wholesome fruit product.

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#### 3. Claim: Made with whole grain

Why Misleading:  
While the product may contain whole grains, it doesn’t imply that it is free from ultra-processing. Many processed foods add minimal whole grains and still contain refined flour, sugar, or additives.

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#### 4. Claim: Organic

Why Misleading:  
A product labeled as “organic” means it is free from artificial preservatives, flavors, colors, and pesticides. However, for a product to claim "100% organic," it must also display certifications like the Jaivik Bharat logo or USDA Organic. Some labels may claim organic status even if only certain ingredients meet the criteria.

#### 5. Claim: Low fat or light

Why Misleading:  
Many low-fat products contain added sugars, refined flour, or starch thickeners to maintain taste, increasing their calorie content. "Light" versions of oils may imply easier absorption but still provide 9 calories per gram like any other fat. Always check for trans fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol content to make informed choices.

#### 6. Claim: No cholesterol or heart healthy

Why Misleading:  
Plant-based oils naturally contain no cholesterol, but all oils are 100% fat. Therefore, claims of “no cholesterol” on oils are unnecessary and can mislead consumers. Oils should still be consumed in moderation for heart health.

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#### 7. Claim: Good source of protein, Vitamin D, or other nutrients

Why Misleading:  
The term “good source” implies that a serving provides 10-19% of the recommended daily nutrient intake. However, relying on this claim alone can be misleading; consumers need to evaluate the total nutrient value in the context of daily requirements.

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#### 8. Claim: Sugar-free / Less sugar

Why Misleading:  
Sugar-free products can contain hidden sugars (like maltitol, fructose, or corn syrup) and fats, contributing to high glycemic index and calorie content. Additionally, manufacturers sometimes list sugars separately (e.g., glucose, cane sugar) to make them appear less prominent.

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#### 9. Claim: Low-calorie / Zero trans fat / Fat-free

Why Misleading:  
Products may contain trans fats below reportable levels but still have unhealthy fats. Packaged foods like snacks may claim low trans fat but have high levels of other fats. Multiple small servings can also accumulate to exceed daily calorie limits.

<https://www.foodprocessing-technology.com/uncategorised/newsfood-brands-in-india-mislead-consumers-with-wrong-labels-study/>

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/health/label-claims-on-packaged-food-could-be-misleading-icmr-101715503801953.html>

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#### 10. Claim: Non-GMO

Why Misleading:  
Some products, like rock salt or mineral water, may claim to be “non-GMO,” even though genetic modification is irrelevant for such items. This can mislead consumers into thinking they are purchasing superior products.

#### 11. Claim: Vegan or plant-based

Why Misleading:  
Plant-based products can still contain high amounts of added sugars and saturated fats. The term "plant-based" can be used loosely, including products with oils or refined carbohydrates that are not necessarily healthy.

<https://www.foodprocessing-technology.com/uncategorised/newsfood-brands-in-india-mislead-consumers-with-wrong-labels-study/>

#### 12. Claim: No added MSG or preservatives

Why Misleading:  
Even when labels claim “no added MSG,” the product may contain ingredients like yeast extract or hydrolyzed proteins, which act as flavor enhancers. These forms of glutamates may function similarly to MSG.

<https://www.insightsonindia.com/2023/05/12/misleading-food-ads-and-regulations-to-curtail-them/>

#### 13. Claim: Gluten-free

Why Misleading:  
Gluten-free products may still contain unhealthy amounts of sugars and oils. Checking nutrition labels is essential to ensure these products don’t compromise health with excessive additives.

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/health/label-claims-on-packaged-food-could-be-misleading-icmr-101715503801953.html>

#### 14. Claim: Farm-fresh or freshly prepared

Why Misleading:  
Without certification or reliable farm-to-table documentation, the terms "farm-fresh" or "freshly prepared" can be vague and unverifiable marketing claims.

<https://www.insightsonindia.com/2023/05/12/misleading-food-ads-and-regulations-to-curtail-them/>

#### 15. Claim: Free of “something”

Why Misleading:  
Products can claim to be free of certain ingredients, but this might not always be accurate. For example, Tic Tacs label their product as "sugar-free" even though each serving contains less than 0.5g of sugar. Similarly, products may state "trans fat-free" if trans fats are present but below reportable levels.