

Factors affecting Israeli consumers' decision to use food label information: A national survey study

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Abstract

Background: Food labeling to encourage healthier food choices may have positive long-term effects. Yet previous studies point to challenges in terms of how consumers understand and use labeling information. The current study seeks to determine how psychological factors related to health and nutrition, food label perceptions, nutrition habits and sociodemographic factors are associated with consumers' decisions to seek and use the information on nutrition food labels more frequently.

Methods: The survey was conducted by a polling company in Israel between November 11 and December 12, 2019. Participants comprised a representative sample of the adult population in Israel age 21 and over. A total of 513 people returned the completed questionnaires, which included the following parts: personal details; frequency of searching for information on food product labels; perceived health risks of foods high in sodium, sugar and saturated fats; Health Belief Model constructs related to food labeling. The statistical analysis entailed ordinal logistics regressions.

Results: While 59.3% of the sample reported that the information on food labels often or always affects their decision to purchase a food product, more than 20% reported often or always consuming products that are high in sugar (32.0%), saturated fats (31.3%) and salt (20.4%). The results of the analytical model show the following HBM variables to be significantly associated with frequency of using information on food labels: higher levels of perceived benefit (OR=1.72, CI 95%=1.12-2.64); higher confidence in reading and understanding food labels (OR=2.48, CI 95%= 1.62-3.78); and higher perceptions of the importance of nutrition (OR= 2.76, CI 95% =1.97-3.87). In addition, women and married people were found to use food label information more frequently.

Conclusions: General public information campaigns and HMOs campaigns with messages to motivate the use of food labels should emphasize the benefits of using labels to select food products. These messages should aim at increasing individuals'

perceived confidence in understanding the information on nutrition labels. The recent front-of-package labeling reform could be an important policy step for achieving healthier nutrition.

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Keywords: Decision-making; Nutrition; Health Belief Model; Food labeling