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## ABSTRACT

The focus of the university's health and wellness programme seek to improve quality of life, enhance productivity, lower healthcare insurance cost, decrease absenteeism, and lower the potential risk for non-communicable diseases and premature mortality among the employees. The study conducted assessed the dietary intakes of the employees. Data were collected using a questionnaire – "USC Workplace Wellness Survey." There were 99 study participants. Results showed some participants consumed fast foods weekly, and others incorporated fruits, vegetables and healthy snacks into their meal plans.

## OBJECTIVE

To evaluate the dietary practices of the employees at the University of the Southern Caribbean.

## METHODS

Cross-sectional sampling was used; 99 employees 18 years and older participated in the study. The data were collected using a questionnaire – "USC Workplace Wellness Survey," which provided relevant information on the dietary habits of participants. Identification numbers were attached for the protection of privacy and confidentiality. The data were analyzed using SPSS-X, version 25.

## RESULTS

Demographic data from the study indicated that most of the participants were females (68.7%) and only 31.3% males; they resided in the east of the island, and few (5.2%) of their counterparts in the south. The most common age range are 31 - 40 years and 50+ years, 26.9% in each category. Dietary practices – almost half of the respondents (46.8%) purchased and eat fast foods once per week, and 48.4% eat one meal outside of the home, and another 45% purchased meals sometimes. More than 40 percent incorporated servings of vegetables; while 49% reported a greater consumption of fruits four or more times. Healthy snacks (granola, fruit, veggies, yoghurt, nuts) were selected by 63.5% of the participants; whereas fewer persons (16.7% in each category) preferred pizzas, pies, and sugar sweetened beverages. Methods of cooking used were boiling (62.4%) and stewing (53.5%). Influencing factors impacting food choices were health principles (52.2%) and available income (44.4%), social media (1.1%) appeared to be the least.

## DISCUSSION

The results showed that at least half of the study participants consumed fast foods once weekly, and forty percent or more made healthy food choices; they added fruits, vegetables and nutritious snacks (>60%) to their meal plans. Also, most respondents selected a low-fat method of cooking (boiling) for food preparation at home. Health principles was sighted as the main influencing factor. More importantly, unhealthy diets (high in fat, sugar and salt) contribute to disease, disability and death. While the incorporation of foods from the fruits and vegetables food groups enhanced diet quality and increased intakes of vitamins, minerals, and dietary fibre. Research showed that the consumption of diets rich in fruits and vegetables can more than likely decrease one's potential risk for disease and premature mortality.

## CONCLUSION

The incorporation of fruits and vegetables in the diet and the selection of healthy snacks are consistent with the recommendations from dietary guidelines for the maintenance of nutritional status.

## REFERENCES

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