

# **KNOWLEDGE, PERCEPTION AND ACCEPTANCE OF COCONUT WATER AS A FUNCTIONAL FOOD AMONG CONSUMERS IN TRINIDAD.**

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**Background:** Coconut water is a natural nutritious beverage that is widely used by athletes, elderly and normal persons. It is considered a functional food or nutraceutical as it contains several biologically active components and possesses heart and liver protective properties as well as hypo- lipidemic and anti- hypertensive properties (Preetha et al, 2013). The popularity of functional foods has increased worldwide today due to its countless health claims.

**Objective:** Chronic diseases are the leading cause of death in Trinidad. Consumer awareness on functional foods and the health benefits of drinking coconut water can encourage healthier food selections and improve the health status of individuals. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate consumer knowledge, perception and acceptance of coconut water as a functional food among consumers in Trinidad.

**Method:** A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data on demographics, knowledge and consumption of coconut water from the target population which consisted of 384 consumers, males (n=209) and females (n=174) who visited local supermarkets in Trinidad. Pearson chi square, descriptive statistics and one way ANOVA was used to analyze data.

**Results:** More than half of the respondents (61.5%) were aware of functional foods and majority, (90.6%) consumed coconut water. There was a significant association between perception of the importance of drinking coconut water and whether or not respondents drank. Consumers (63.8%) stated that the key reasons for drinking coconut water was due to its taste, health benefits of flushing the kidneys and bladder (77.3%), preventing dehydration (64.9%) and boosting the immune system (32.5%). Consumers (63.0%) preferred fresh coconut water over bottled coconut water because of flavor changes (37.6%) and the price of bottled coconut (41.3%).

**Conclusion:** There is a high consumption of coconut water in Trinidad. However, an increase in consumer awareness on the functional properties of coconut water and other functional foods is needed.