

AWARENESS AND USE OF NUTRITION INFORMATION ON FOOD PACKAGES AMONG CONSUMERS IN ST. AUGUSTINE, TRINIDAD.

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Background: Food product labelling has become a very popular health tool that allows consumers to make well informed health related decisions when purchasing and consuming food products. This study presents findings in a qualitative and quantitative investigation of nutrition information awareness and usage in St. Augustine Trinidad.

Objectives: The study attempts to evaluate the level of knowledge and use of nutrition information on food packages among consumers in St. Augustine Trinidad.

Design: Data was collected from one hundred and forty consumers using a structured questionnaire, open-ended questions, an informal interview and observations.

Results: The findings indicate that the main demographic features of the participants were: 57.1% age range 18 - 24 years, 50.5% male, 51.4% completed tertiary (university) education, 69.3% single, 50.0% earn < \$8000 monthly. Majority (38.6%) of the participants use a shopping list sometimes, 20.9% said that price was the main influence when choosing items to purchase as compared to (18.9%) Taste, (14.4%) Nutrition information, (13.7%) Appearance, (12.3%) convenience, (9.6%) Habit, (8.9%) brand name, and (1.2%) other. 73.6% said that they look at ingredients/nutrition information on packaged foods that they are deciding to purchase or about to eat. The relationship between level of education and habit (factor that influences food choices when purchasing food) showed that there is a statistically significant correlation according to the significant (2 tailed) value of 0.006.

Conclusion: Answers to the open ended questions showed awareness of the nutrition information but some consumers did not understand how to use it or why it was important or how it directly related to health and wellness. These findings however need to be interpreted with caution as they are based on consumers' self reports of nutrition information use and awareness which is highly subjective.