



Exercise enthusiasts' perceptions and beliefs of functional foods in Trinidad, West Indies

Exercise
enthusiasts'
perceptions

345

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Abstract

Purpose – There is unprecedented interest by consumers to improve health and wellness through dietary means. This first study conducted in Trinidad, West Indies, aims to examine the exercise enthusiasts' perceptions, choices, reasons and beliefs of functional foods.

Design/methodology/approach – A structured questionnaire was administered to 120 randomly chosen exercise/fitness enthusiasts at six gyms located in East and Central regions.

Findings – Only 50.5 per cent had heard of at least one term either "functional" or "nutraceutical" or "designer" foods with the most familiar term (34.3 per cent; $p < 0.05$) being "functional". Frequency of exercise ($p < 0.01$) and age ($p < 0.05$) were influential factors affecting familiarity to functional term. Tomatoes (89.5 per cent) and cabbages (83.2 per cent) were popular vegetable choices. Energy giving was selected as most (71.6 per cent; $p < 0.05$) important health claim. The perceived benefit of functional foods was more for performance enhancement rather than for health. Functional foods were considered expensive (47.4 per cent), prevented disease (46.3 per cent), necessary for older people (37.9 per cent) and were different from others. On comparing the respondent's agreement of manufacturer's health claims of functional foods with their own beliefs, 39.0 per cent "agreed/strongly agreed" that the manufacturers exaggerated their health claims. Gender did not ($p > 0.05$) influence responses.

Originality/value – Although, limited in sample size, the reasons given for consumption of functional foods and the chosen foods could guide marketers and food product developers. The study highlighted the need for public education on the health benefits and regulatory measures on functional foods.

Keywords Exercise, Diet, Personal health, Consumer behaviour, Trinidad

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