

ABSTRACT

Assessment of Health Claims on Retail Packaged Food Products Sold in Trinidad and Tobago in Respect to Omega-3 Fatty Acids and Cardiovascular Diseases

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Health claims are very visible today more than ever, as there is an increasing quest for optimal health. This research paper aims to generate information regarding to: (1) whether or not food products sold in Trinidad and Tobago comply with food labeling laws and regulations of their respective countries with reverence to health claims made pertaining to omega-3 fatty acids and (2) the level of awareness, knowledge and purchasing behaviour of consumers on omega-3 fatty acids foods and their benefits pertaining to Cardiovascular Diseases (CVDs). One hundred and twelve (112) products were identified to be fortified with omega-3 fatty acids, however only 1.8% carried true health claims. Data collected from n=171 participants at 16 retail outlets using an online data survey application revealed that middle aged adults (35-44 years) were the majority of the participants with 42.9% (76% females and 24% males). These participants were of mixed ethnicity (40.4%), attained tertiary level education (80.1%), were aware of the nutrient omega-3 fatty acids (97%) and had some knowledge about this nutrient (78%). They also bought foods containing this nutrient (63%) such as fish or fish oils (84%) and consumed them daily (38%). Results showed that knowledge, gender, age and education held no statistical significance on the variables of purchasing, perception and reading of food labels pertaining to omega-3 fatty acids products. The study concluded that persuasive and true health claims maybe a key factor in the successful development, promotion and creation of demands for foods fortified with omega-3 fatty acids, as most consumers are customary food label readers. Thus generating an immense opportunity for omega-3 fatty acids fortified food products to be used as a primary and or secondary treatment of CVDs in Trinidad and Tobago, consequently reducing annual deaths and estimated cost in the management of such diseases.

Keywords: functional foods; omega-3 fatty acid foods; health claims; food laws; food regulations; cardiovascular diseases; Tricia Maynard.