

Functional Foods and Health Halo Effect

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There is not a globally accepted definition of functional food. Each country defines it similarly and has specific regulations about functional foods. First time it has been mentioned and improved labeling regulations for functional foods in Japan. Then United States (US) and Europe follow this issue. Health claims of functional foods are need to be approved for using in the marketing. In Japan Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, in US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and in Europe European Food and Safety Association (EFSA) prepare opinion report about health claims of functional foods and determine regulations [1-3].

Nutrition and health claims affect individual perceptions and attitudes, thus food preferences. Halo effect is the tendency for an impression of a situation to influence impression of another condition. Health halo effect is overestimating the healthfulness of an item based on a single claim. Health halo effects of foods related with their nutrition and health claims. Nutrition and health claims can effect individuals' food perception and behaviours both positively and negatively. In this case, perception of health claims as a miraculous effect may tend to consume excessive amounts of that food, thus depending on the composition of the food excessive intake of some food components and this can be resulted in adverse health effects. On the other hand, an accurate understanding of health claims can lead individuals to make more healthier food preferences [4-6].

Studies have shown that individuals find food and health claims useful, but they cannot correctly perceive and differentiate claims while short descriptions are more effective than long descriptions on labels [7-9]. Therefore, it is important that increasing individuals' knowledge and awareness in this area in order to be able to recognize functional foods and benefit from health effects, avoiding the unfavorable consequences of the halo effect. To conclude there is a need more studies to clarify relation between perceptions, attitudes and behaviours of individuals about functional foods and health halo effects.

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