CFDR Presents Tracking Nutrition Trends 2013

Do you wonder how knowledgeable Canadians believe themselves to be about nutrition, or what factors are most important to them when selecting food? What difference does “low trans fat” or “contains probiotics” or “low in sodium” make when Canadians select their food? Do Canadians read and understand nutrition labels? If these questions are important to you then Tracking Nutrition Trends is a survey that will interest you.

Background
In 1989 the Tracking Nutrition Trends (TNT) survey was established to investigate self-reported knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of the adult Canadian population with respect to food and nutrition. Tracking Nutrition Trends 2013 is the eighth iteration of this study and the first one completed by the Canadian Foundation for Dietetic Research (CFDR).

Similar to the last iteration in 2008, this was an online survey of 2,004 adults across Canada. The data was weighted by the latest Statistics Canada 2011 census to ensure representation of Canada's population by region, age and gender.

Key Insights

Eating Habits and Health
Canadians consider their eating habits (77%) and health (78%) to be good to excellent. This is slightly higher than the results in 2008. However, there are still almost one quarter of Canadians who think their eating habits and health are fair to poor. Almost all Canadians indicate that they have done something during the past year to improve or change their eating and drinking habits. The top three improvements are eating more fruits and vegetables (68%), reducing salt/sodium (50%) and reducing sugar (50%).

Consistent with 2008, the majority of Canadians eat dinner every day (87%), while less than two-thirds of Canadians indicate that they eat breakfast (63%) or lunch (64%) daily. Canadians eat meals prepared at home at least five days a week, with breakfast the most frequently prepared at home, followed by dinner. Younger Canadians are more likely to eat out for lunch and dinner compared to older Canadians.

Two thirds of Canadians indicated that they take some form of supplements with Vitamin D the most consumed (32%), followed by multi-vitamins (30%).

Knowledge and Understanding of Nutrition
In TNT 2013 Canadians considered themselves very or somewhat knowledgeable about food and nutrition (82%), with women and those with higher education being more confident of their knowledge.

In order to test some of their knowledge, a number of true false questions were asked. Very few Canadians answered all of the questions correctly (8%); however, those who think they are knowledgeable generally had a good understanding of nutrition. Most understood the relationship between sodium/salt and blood pressure (93%) but only 34% correctly stated that the statement ‘the amount of cholesterol people eat is the major factor that affects their blood cholesterol’ is false.
Influences on Food Choice
Many factors influence a person’s food choice. When asked about the importance of taste, nutrition, cost and convenience, taste was identified as the most important (97%). Nutrition and cost were also important. Similar to 2008, maintaining good health is a factor in food choice. More Canadians indicate that they are following a special or prescribed diet compared to 2008 (48% vs. 31%).

When selecting food specific nutrient levels are important. Over 70% of Canadians indicate that the following influence their food choice—if the food is: a source of protein, low in fat (total, saturated fat or trans fat), a source of fibre, a source of whole grains, low in sodium/salt and low in sugar.

Previous experience with a product as well as where it is produced—locally (within their province) or in Canada—are also important factors when making food choices.

Food Product Labels
Canadians read labels for information related to food and nutrition information rather than health benefit statements. More than half of Canadians indicate that they usually or always look at the best before date, the ingredient list and the nutrition facts table. Seventy-one percent say they often/sometimes compare the nutritional quality in similar types of food and read labels to get a general idea of calorie content of the food. Consistent with 2008, less than half of Canadians use the information on food packages to determine how much of the product they or their family should eat.

Sources of Nutrition Information
Canadians access information about food and nutrition from various sources, the most popular being those that are easily accessible. Consistent with 2008, food product labels top the list (70%). Other common sources include the nutrition facts table (51%), the internet (50%), friends/relatives/colleagues (49%) and magazines (48%).

The sources considered to be the most credible are not the most used. For example, the most credible are family physicians/health professionals (94%) and dietitians (88%). However only 50% and 21% respectively received information from these sources.

Segmentation Results
A cluster analysis was performed to group Canadians who possess similar characteristics. The clusters were analyzed using all demographic information, knowledge of nutrition, use of supplements, influences on food choices and attitudes and behaviour towards food and nutrition. Three distinct clusters were revealed:
1. Not engaged in healthy living/eating (25%)
2. Health conscious (26%)
3. Weight/ingredient conscious (49%)

Tracking Nutrition Trends provides insight into Canadians’ self-perceived nutrition knowledge and behaviours around diet and food choice. This information is valuable to health professionals, policy makers, academics and industry. TNT 2013 is CFDR’s first version of the survey and the Foundation intends to continue this long-standing program. TNT 2013 was sponsored by General Mills Canada and Dairy Farmers of Canada. As well, like all CFDR research programs, TNT was made possible with the financial support of CFDR’s corporate partners listed at http://www.cfdr.ca/About/Partners.aspx and the many dietitians who donate to the Foundation.

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