Survey on the Nutrition Labelling Scheme

4 July 2011
Survey Objective:

- To gauge Hong Kong people’s knowledge of and attitude towards the Nutrition Labelling Scheme.

Survey Methodology:

- The Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies of CUHK was commissioned by BFRC to conduct the survey;
- Data was collected by means of a telephone survey between 1-9 June 2011;
- The target respondents are Hong Kong permanent residents aged 18 or above;
- A total of 1,005 respondents were successfully interviewed, with a response rate of 44.1%.
Findings
Did respondents know that Hong Kong had implemented the “Nutrition Labelling Scheme”?

79.2% of respondents indicated that they already knew Hong Kong had implemented the “Nutrition Labelling Scheme” and 20.8% indicated that they did not. The respondents’ rate of awareness (close to 80%) regarding the implementation of the “Nutrition Labelling Scheme” is fairly high.
81.8% of respondents indicated that they mainly came to know about the “Nutrition Labelling Scheme” through television and radio programs, 29.7% indicated through newspapers and magazines, 5.8% indicated through online information, 1.3% indicated through exhibitions and seminars, 2.3% indicated they were introduced by relatives or friends, 11.6% indicated seeing it when purchasing food and 1.1% indicated other sources of information. Respondents are generally reliant on electronic media, such as television and radio programs, to know about the “Nutrition Labelling Scheme”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Means from which respondents knew about the “Nutrition Labelling Scheme”</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Television, Radio programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Don’t know/Forgot</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
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How frequently do respondents consult the nutrition labels or nutrition claims?

- Frequently, 25.3%
- Sometimes, 37.3%
- Rarely, 17.9%
- Never, 17.6%
- Don’t know/Forgot, 0.7%
- Never purchase pre-packaged food items, 1.1%

25.3% of respondents indicated that they frequently consult the nutrition labels or nutrition claims on the package before purchasing pre-packaged food items, 37.3% indicated that they sometimes do, 17.9% indicated that they rarely do, 17.6% indicated that they never do and 1.1% indicated that they never purchase pre-packaged food items. Over 60% of respondents indicated that when purchasing pre-packaged food items, they will consult, at varying levels, the nutrition labels or nutrition claims.
Reasons for consulting the nutrition labels and nutrition claims

A majority answered to choose healthier food items (67.4%). The remainder of answers were quite diverse: 12% of respondents indicated that they consult nutrition labels and nutrition claims when purchasing a particular food item for the first time, 8.2% indicated that they do when purchasing food for children, 15.4% indicated that they do when comparing similar food items, 4% indicated that they do when diagnosed with a chronic illness, 8.8% indicated that they do because they want to be or are in the process of losing weight, 12.1% indicated that they do in hopes of preventing the contraction of illness and 7.4% indicated other reasons.
What types of nutritional information are respondents mainly mindful of?

26.2% of respondents indicated that when consulting food nutrition labels, they are mainly mindful of protein levels, 25.5% indicated that they are mainly mindful of carbohydrates, 49.3% indicated that they are mainly mindful of sugars, 45.7% indicated that they are mainly mindful of total fat, 35.2% indicated that they are mainly mindful of saturated fat, 47.4% indicated that they are mainly mindful of trans fat, 36.4% indicated that they are mainly mindful of sodium, 39.3% indicated that they are mainly mindful of energy and 13.6% indicated that they are mainly mindful of other items.
20.1% of respondents indicated that the reason they do not consult nutrition labels is because they do not understand the nutrition labels, 13.1% indicated that they do not believe they are useful, 2.8% indicated that they have no time to consult them, 10.4% indicated that they are illiterate, 25.6% indicated that it is unnecessary to consult the labels for frequently consumed items, 17.3% indicated that they find it too troublesome and 18.1% indicated other reasons. Results reflect that a portion of respondents overlooked the nutrition facts on the pre-packaged food items that they regularly consume, and, for some respondents, nutrition labels are rather complicated and difficult to understand. These reasons serve to obstruct respondents from establishing a habit of consulting nutrition labels.
How helpful do respondents find the “Nutrition Labelling Scheme” with choosing healthier food items?

22.7% of respondents indicated that they find the “Nutrition Labelling Scheme” very helpful with choosing healthier food items, 55.1% indicated that they find it quite helpful, 15.3% indicated that they find it not very helpful and 3.5% indicated that they find it not helpful at all. Close to 78% of respondents indicated that the “Nutrition Labelling Scheme” was helpful with choosing healthier food items. Results show that respondents demonstrated a generally positive attitude towards the effectiveness of the “Nutrition Labelling Scheme” in helping them to choose healthier food items.
How helpful do respondents find the measure which stipulates that the nutrition claims must adhere to special conditions in regard to choosing healthier pre-packaged food items?

- Very helpful, 30.3%
- Quite helpful, 49.4%
- Not very helpful, 13.7%
- Not helpful at all, 2.5%
- Don’t know/No comments, 4.1%

30.3% of respondents indicated that they find it very helpful in helping them choose healthier pre-packaged food items, 49.4% indicated that they find it quite helpful, 13.7% indicated that they find it not very helpful and 2.5% indicated that they find it not helpful at all. Close to 80% of respondents indicated that the regulations on nutrition claims had helped them in choosing healthier food items. A majority of respondents are confident in the effectiveness of the measure regulating nutrition claims on food packaging, under the “Nutrition Labelling Scheme”.
Confidence in nutrition claims after the implementation of the “Nutrition Labelling Scheme”

57% of respondents indicated that their level of confidence in nutrition claims on pre-packaged food items has now increased, 37.7% indicated that it has stayed more or less the same and 1.7% indicated that it has decreased. Evidently, the implementation of the “Nutrition Labelling Scheme” contributed to the increase of respondents’ confidence levels towards nutrition claims on pre-packaged food items.
Do respondents think that the types of pre-packaged food items sold in markets have increased, decreased or stayed more or less the same as a year ago?

36.8% of respondents indicated that, relative to a year ago, the types of pre-packaged food items sold in markets have now increased, 43% indicated that they have stayed more or less the same and 1.5% indicated that they have decreased.
14% of respondents indicated that they believe the food items were low in quality, 15.2% indicated that they believe the food items lacked freshness, 56.8% indicated that they believe it is because of legal regulations regarding nutrition labelling and 22.3% indicated other reasons. Although many participants attributed this decline to the legal regulations of nutrition labels on pre-packaged food items, this sample is too small (those who believe types of food items have decreased only constitute 1.5% of the total sample); hence, the question should be further explored, in order to provide a more precise answer.
54.5% of respondents indicated that their level of confidence in nutrition facts indicated on pre-packaged food items has now increased, 39.3% indicated that it has stayed more or less the same and 1.5% indicated that it has decreased. Survey results demonstrate that the “Nutrition Labelling Scheme” significantly facilitated the increase of respondents’ confidence levels towards the nutrition facts on pre-packaged food items.
Will the “Nutrition Labelling Scheme” encourage the food industry to produce more healthy foods?

73.2% of respondents indicated that the “Nutrition Labelling Scheme” will be able to encourage the food industry to introduce more healthy food products and 16.2% indicated that it will not be able to. In general, respondents are fairly confident that the “Nutrition Labelling Scheme” can encourage the food industry to introduce more healthy food products.
Awareness towards the “3 Low, 1 High” healthy eating principle

85.4% of respondents indicated that they have heard of the “3 Low, 1 High” healthy eating principle and 14.6% indicated that they have not or that they have forgotten. Evidently, the respondents’ rate of awareness regarding the “3 Low, 1 High” healthy eating principle is fairly high.
Respondents were asked to indicate what elements constitute “3 Low, 1 High”, 50.9% indicated that the “3 Low, 1 High” healthy eating principle constitutes low fat, 68.9% indicated that it constitutes low sugar, 57% indicated that it constitutes low salt/low sodium, 40.3% indicated that it constitutes high fibre, 21.4% indicated other items and 20.9% indicated that they did not know or that they could not identify.
To analyze it from a different perspective, in regard to the level of understanding of the “3 Low, 1 High” healthy eating principle, 14.6% of respondents indicated that they have never heard of it, 6.3% indicated that they knew about it and answered one item correctly, 18.7% indicated that they knew about it and answered two items correctly, 24.1% indicated that they knew about it and answered three items correctly, 17.3% indicated that they knew about it and answered all items correctly, 1.1% indicated that they knew about it but answered all items incorrectly and 17.8% indicated that they knew about it but could not identify any item. Results show that, although many respondents indicated that they have heard of the “3 Low, 1 High” healthy eating principle, in reality, they have insufficient understanding of the principle.
Have respondents either read or heard about the Hong Kong government’s promotions regarding the “Nutrition Labelling Scheme”?

Respondents’ awareness and understanding of nutrition labelling is largely reliant on government promotions, as survey results show that 69.4% of respondents indicated that they have either read or heard about the government’s promotions regarding the “Nutrition Labelling Scheme” and 30.1% indicated that they have not.
How helpful do respondents find the government promotions are to their understanding of the “nutrition labelling” and “nutrition claim” measures?

7.4% of respondents indicated that they find government promotions very helpful to their understanding of the “nutrition labelling” and “nutrition claim” measures, 41.6% indicated that they find it quite helpful, 17.7% indicated that they find it not very helpful and 1.3% indicated that they find it not helpful at all. Those who had read or heard of government promotions regarding nutrition labelling demonstrated a generally positive attitude towards such publicity.
Conclusion

- Respondents possess a fair level of awareness regarding the “Nutrition Labelling Scheme”;

- Respondents possess a positive attitude in regard to the Scheme (whether it be towards the Scheme’s helpfulness with choosing healthy pre-packaged food items, or their level of confidence towards the nutrition facts and nutrition claims on pre-packaged food items);

- Respondents’ level of awareness towards the “3 Low, 1 High” healthy eating principle (i.e. low sugar, low fat, low salt/low sodium and high fibre) is quite high; however, their level of understanding of the “3 Low, 1 High” healthy eating principle can be further improved.
Q&A Session