

Supplemented Foods: Developing a Knowledge Translation Strategy



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Introduction

Supplemented foods are part of a growing sector of the food environment in Canada.

A **supplemented food** is “a product that is manufactured, sold or presented as a food that has been modified to increase the levels of, or has added, substances such as vitamins, minerals, amino acids, herbals or bioactives, which may perform a physiological role beyond the provision of nutritive requirements.”¹

Supplemented food (e.g., bars, vitamin waters, caffeinated energy drinks) labels may contain caution statements or directions for use.



Health literacy is a barrier to understanding food labels and nutrition information.² It is an important consideration for approaches to nutrition education.

Health literacy is “the ability to access, comprehend, evaluate and communicate information as a way to promote, maintain, and improve health in a variety of settings across the life-course.”³

Health Canada is in the process of developing policy options for the management of supplemented foods. A health literate approach for educating Canadians about supplemented foods will be developed to accompany the policies.

Review Question

What is known about consumers’ and intermediaries’ health literacy in relation to supplemented foods?

Methods

A reference librarian was consulted to help develop the literature search strategy. The search was expanded to include the term “functional foods” as a proxy for “supplemented foods”.

Functional foods are “foods demonstrated to have a physiological benefit beyond basic nutritional functioning.”⁴

Eight bibliographic databases were searched. Titles and abstracts were screened first, followed by the full texts. Publications were selected for inclusion if they examined a relationship between one or more aspects of health literacy and functional foods.

Results

The search strategy identified 211 records. Of these, 25 publications met the inclusion criteria. The study settings, designs, and participants were heterogeneous, making comparisons across studies difficult.

Both consumers and intermediaries reported:

- learning about functional foods from advertising;
- difficulty understanding the concept of functional foods and for whom they were intended; and
- concerns about the safety of, and need for, functional foods.

Evidence Gaps

There is a lack of data on:

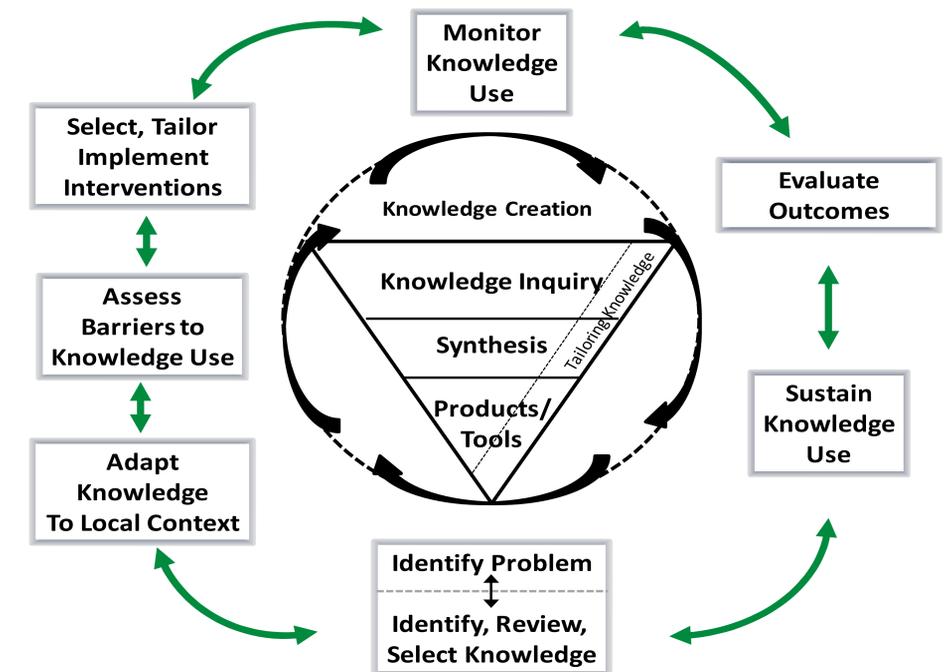
- Canadians’ knowledge of functional foods;
- the types and sources of information that Canadians seek out, or are exposed to, in regards to functional foods; and
- how Canadians understand, evaluate, and communicate about information related to functional foods.

Conclusions

Education is needed to help Canadians:

- identify supplemented foods and understand the label information;
- evaluate the information to make an informed decision; and
- choose foods that meet their nutritional needs and goals.

A knowledge translation and exchange (KTE) strategy will help to inform consumers, health care providers, and other intermediaries about Health Canada policies on supplemented foods .



Summary of KTE components⁵

References

1. Health Canada. Draft definition.
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3. Public Health Agency of Canada (2014). About health literacy. Accessed on April 7, 2015 from: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/cd-mc/hl-ls/index-eng.php>.
4. Health Canada (1998). Nutraceuticals/functional foods and health claims on food (policy paper). Accessed on April 7, 2015 from http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/label-etiquet/claims-reclam/nutra-funct_foods-nutra-fonct_aliment-eng.php.
5. (Adapted from) Graham et al. Lost in knowledge translation: Time for a map? *Journal of Continuing Education in the Health Professions*, Vol. 26, No. 1, Winter 2006, pages 13-24.