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What is a nutritious snack? Level of processing and macronutrient content influences young adults' perceptions

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Manuscript Title:

What is a nutritious snack? Level of processing and macronutrient content influences young adults' perceptions.

Abstract

Snacking has become more prevalent in developed countries. While poor food choices pose health risks, nutritious choices contribute important nutrients to overall dietary intakes. Young adults consumer snacks frequently and nutritious choices should be promoted among this group. However, how young adults define the term 'nutritious' currently and how they evaluate the nutritiousness of various snack foods required further investigation. The current study used a mixed methods design with 115 young adults invited to sort 32 commonly available snack foods into a line ranging from 'not nutritious' to 'very nutritious'. The sorting data was analysed by hierarchical cluster analysis and multi-dimensional scaling (MDS) analysis. Participants were also asked to define the word 'nutritious', with definitions then categorized and number of counts per category analysed. Predictors of perceived snack nutritiousness were sugar ($\beta = -.45, P < .005$), fat ($\beta = -.43, P < .05$), nut ($\beta = .45, P < .05$) and fruit/vegetable ($\beta = .33, P < .05$) content. Level of food processing was significantly related to perceived nutritiousness ($\beta = .79, P < .05$). The terms given within the definitions most frequently were: 'vitamins' (40%), 'good for body/body needs' (40%), 'minerals' (39%), 'low in sugars' (36%), 'protein' (32%), 'healthy' (28%) and 'long lasting source of energy' (27%). Results of the current study provide first insight into how young adults interpret the term 'nutritious'. This could help in the design of more effective nutrition education materials and food product labels to guide healthy choices in this age group.

Keywords: snacks, young adults, health perception, definition, nutritious, nutritiousness

Abbreviations: (-)

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