



A comparison of the healthiness of packaged foods and beverages from 12 countries using the Health Star Rating nutrient profiling system, 2013-2018

Globally, we are seeing a rise in the prevalence of diet-related chronic diseases including obesity and type 2 diabetes. Indeed, the prevalence of these diseases is increasing simultaneously as we are witnessing an increase in the consumption of packaged and ultra-processed foods. These products are often high in fat, sugar and salt and contain little health benefits. In an attempt to promote the consumption of higher quality foods, many countries are developing nutrient profiling systems aimed at improving the overall nutritional quality of diets. Among the different profiling systems developed, the Australasian Health Star Rating system, a “voluntary interpretive front-of-pack nutrition labelling system in place since 2014”, has been identified as one of the most popular ones. The objective of this study was therefore “to use the Health Star Rating nutrient profiling scheme to examine the overall healthiness of national packaged food and beverage supplies and the healthiness of packaged food and beverage categories available in a selection of high and middle-income countries across the globe.”

The study compared the healthiness of packaged foods and beverages between selected countries using the Health Star Rating nutrient profiling system. Packaged foods and beverages data collected 2013–2018 were obtained for Australia, Canada, Chile, China, India, Hong Kong, Mexico, New Zealand, Slovenia, South Africa, the UK, and USA. Each product was assigned to a food or beverage category and mean Health Star Rating was calculated overall by category and by country. 394,815 products were included in the analysis. Taken from 12 different countries, the study highlighted “clear differences in the rankings of the mean nutrient profile of packaged food and beverage products.” Additionally, the study highlighted “substantial variation in rankings of median levels of nutrients of concern such as sodium, saturated fat and total sugars.” Overall, the analysis highlighted some clear variability regarding the healthiness of products across the different countries. Given these disparities, the study emphasises the “need for continuous monitoring and reporting of the healthiness of products across diverse countries.”

Reference: Dunford, E.K. et al. A comparison of the healthiness of packaged foods and beverages from 12 countries using the Health Star Rating nutrient profiling system, 2013-2018. *Obesity Reviews*. 2019;1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1111/obr.12879>