

The nutritional quality of foods carrying health-related claims in Germany, The Netherlands, Spain, Slovenia and the United Kingdom

In the European Union, diet has been recognised as a leading risk factor impacting the rise in non-communicable diseases. Public health interventions aimed at improving diet should therefore become a priority given both their ability to have individual and population-wide impacts. In an attempt to harmonise the food environment across the European Union, a Regulation has defined health claims as “any claim that states, suggests or implies that a relationship exists between a food category, a food or one of its constituents and health’ whereas nutrition claims are ‘any claim that states, suggests or implies that a food has particular beneficial nutritional properties due to the energy, nutrients or others substances it contains, contains in reduced or increased proportions or does not contain.” Overall, health-related claims aim to help consumers make better, healthier and more informed food choices. However, evidence is still missing regarding the effects on consumers’ behaviours. Therefore, this study was set out to answer four key questions:

1. Are foods that carry a health-related claim healthier than those that do not?
2. Does this differ by type of claim? (health claims vs nutrition claims)
3. Are there differences by food category?
4. Are there country differences?

2034 foods were collected and included in this study. Overall, “foods that carry health claims have significantly lower levels of energy, protein, total sugars, saturated fat and sodium and significantly more fibre than foods that do not carry health claims. Foods that carry nutrition claims follow a similar pattern, with significantly lower levels of energy, protein, total sugars, total fat, saturated fat and significantly more fibre.”

Reference: A Kaur et al. The nutritional quality of foods carrying health-related claims in Germany, The Netherlands, Spain, Slovenia and the United Kingdom. *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. 2016;70(12):1388–1395.