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The healthy food choice

What do we know about consumers in Switzerland?

Abstract

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The Swiss Society for Nutrition SSN was commissioned by the Federal Office of Public Health FOPH to perform a literature review concerning the healthy choice of foods by consumers in Switzerland. From December 2010 to August 2011 research and publications were searched by conducting a database and internet search as well as through contacting stakeholders. A total of 54 relevant publications could be identified.

How important is healthy food choice for consumers in Switzerland?

All of the studies point to a great interest in the topic of nutrition. On average, three out of four people indicate that nutrition is important or of interest to them. However, precisely what the consumers in Switzerland find interesting or important about nutrition frequently cannot be derived from the data. Women pay more attention to nutrition than men, and those who are overweight more than those of normal weight. Furthermore, the awareness for nutrition rises with increasing age and higher education.

What do consumers in Switzerland pay attention to when they buy food?

On average, 77% of the consumers focus on whether a product tastes good or gives them enjoyment. If they have to decide between enjoyment and health, or rank these two aspects in order of importance, enjoyment wins by a nose. Three out of four consumers take an interest in the composition of a product and 71% indicate that they place value on balance and health. Yet one must ask exactly how they judge the health value and the balance of a product when fewer than half of them say that they pay attention to the nutritional value and other nutritional information. A good half of the consumers pay attention to origin and durability. More than a third look at the price, but many find quality and enjoyment more important.

What keeps consumers in Switzerland from making the healthy choice?

The (in)comprehensibility of information on the packaging, „not thinking about it“, preferences and habits as well as finances are most frequently mentioned in Switzerland as obstacles standing in the way of healthy nutrition. Every second consumer has difficulties understanding nutrition-related information on packages, and every fifth admits to having trouble judging what healthy or unhealthy nutrition is or finds the recommendations to be contradictory. Also widespread is the erroneous belief that healthy food cannot possibly taste good, nor can it be inexpensive, and that, on the whole, it takes a lot of time and effort if one wants to eat healthily. Many of the impediments named by the consumers point to an inadequate level of nutritional competence.



What supporting measures would consumers in Switzerland like to have?

Three out of four consumers in Switzerland want to see a uniform labelling of healthy foods. Otherwise nothing is known about what kind of support consumers in Switzerland would like to have in order to facilitate their selection of healthy foods. In the context of overweight, supported are above all measures that do not impose any direct costs on the individual, but which instead create a health-promoting environment, without the individual being forced to use the corresponding offers.

What supporting measures already exist in Switzerland?

In Switzerland there are a multitude of measures, projects and programmes that are designed to promote healthy choice. Only a small share of the identified offers support consumers directly when they are shopping. Most of them focus on building up knowledge, understanding and skills around nutrition and food or eating, drinking and cooking - also known as food literacy - of present-day as well as future consumers.

In the view of the Swiss Society for Nutrition SSN, what actions need to be taken?

Everyone should be able to eat in a healthy, balanced and enjoyable way. The important thing is not to patronise consumers, but rather to give them adequate skills. With comprehensible, readily accessible information they should be put in a position where they can make informed, knowledgeable and healthy choices for themselves. An especially important element in this effort is that all of the actors involved in nutrition, nutritional education and nutritional communication should convey the same messages and recommendations.

Link to full report (in German): www.sge-ssn.ch/de/wissenschaft-und-forschung/sge-projekte/konsumenteninformation