

Food Effects and Food Choices: Aligning the Two for Better Health

Authors : John Monro, Suman Mishra

Abstract : Choosing foods for health benefits requires information that accurately represents the relative effectiveness of foods with respect to specific health end points, or with respect to responses leading to health outcomes. At present consumers must rely on nutrient composition data, and on health claims to guide them to healthy food choices. Nutrient information may be of limited usefulness because it does not reflect the effect of food structure and food component interactions – that is, whole food effects. Health claims demand stringent criteria that exclude most foods, even though most foods have properties through which they may contribute to positive health outcomes in a diet. In this presentation, we show how the functional efficacy of foods may be expressed in the same format as nutrients, with weight units, as virtual food components that allow a nutrition information panel to show not only what a food is, but also what it does. In the presentation, two body responses linked to well-being are considered – glycaemic response and colonic bulk – in order to illustrate the concept. We show how the nutrient information on available carbohydrates and dietary fibre values obtained by food analysis methods fail to provide information of the glycaemic potency or the colonic bulking potential of foods, because of failings in the methods and approach taken to food analysis. It is concluded that a category of food values that represent the functional efficacy of foods is required to accurately guide food choices for health.

Keywords : dietary fibre, glycaemic response, food values, food effects, health

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