

Topic Area: Food Content, Selection and Safety

Abstract Title

Examining the relationship between price, nutrient content and the on-package marketing of ready-to-eat breakfast cereals

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Abstract

Introduction: Canadians are large consumers of RTE breakfast cereals, raising concerns due to their high level of processing and conflicting evidence regarding their contribution to nutrient adequacy. Previous research has indicated that these products bear a high degree of marketing, which in addition to price has been shown to impact product purchasing and therefore diets.

Objectives: Examine the relationship between RTE breakfast cereal price, nutrient content (fibre, sodium and sugar), and the presence of on-package nutrition marketing.

Methods: Product information was collected from RTE breakfast cereals (n=791) available in three conventional and three discount banner super-markets in Toronto. On-package marketing was categorized as nutrition/health or "other" claims (e.g. no artificial colours, non-GMO). Price and nutrient content were considered per 100g of product.

Results: Linear regression analyses, controlling for package size and store of acquisition, revealed products that bore nutrition/health claims were not significantly higher priced than those without claims. RTE cereals that bore 'other' claims, however, were significantly more expensive than those without. Similar analyses revealed a significant positive relationship between price and sugar, sodium content. RTE cereals with nutrition/health claims were higher in fibre and lower in sugar and sodium. When these nutrients were assessed against the presence of "other" claims, no significant relationships were found.

Conclusions: The little price difference and better nutrient profile of products containing nutrition/health claims suggests such products may provide nutritional guidance. The higher price of products containing more sugar and sodium is in keeping with previous arguments that premium products may not be of better nutritional quality. These findings also expose a potential need to educate about "other" claims, which appear to highlight poorer nutritional quality products at a higher price, compared to those without such claims.

Dietetic Significance: Findings can be used to improve consumer's awareness and understanding of food labels and product selection, especially regarding price.