



## Consumers' Knowledge About Healthy Foods: Lessons Learned to Support Healthy Behaviour

Daleen van der Merwe<sup>1,2</sup>, Hanli de Beer<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa. <sup>2</sup>Africa Unit for Transdisciplinary Health Sciences, Potchefstroom, South Africa

### Abstract

**Introduction:** Rising numbers in non-communicable diseases (NCDs) is a public health concern. Even with an increased health-consciousness reported among consumers, changing their behaviour in favour of healthier food options has been challenging. Overconsumption of energy-dense foods is often too conveniently and readily available. Although the food label is instrumental in enabling consumers making healthier food choices, in-store food decisions are often reliant on price. We, however, emphasise with this study the role of knowledge supported by lifestyle in making healthier food choices.

**Methodology:** We report of findings of two separate studies regarding consumers' subjective and objective knowledge regarding healthy foods. Both involved cross-sectional surveys. However, the first study sample (N = 157) entailed urban consumers working in the corporate sector of South Africa exposed to a wellness intervention programme while the second study involved general consumers recruited on social media meeting stipulated inclusion criteria (N = 223). In both surveys, subjective knowledge and objective knowledge were determined using different survey instruments.

**Results and Discussion:** In Study 1 respondents SK about health food were high (mean =  $3.59 \pm 0.83$ ) on the 5-point agreement Likert scale. The same was shown for SK about frequently consumed healthy foods ( $4.03 \pm 0.55$ ) and SK about nutrient intake limitations ( $3.59 \pm 0.83$ ). Although OK regarding healthy foods in the context of behaviours under specific circumstances and food myths and controversial issues was high, less than 40% respondents had correct responses regarding weight and cholesterol. Study 2 revealed moderate to good knowledge among respondents about food-related health aspects while SK regarding frequently consumed healthy foods (mean =  $4.03 \pm 0.55$ ) and nutrient intake limitations (mean =  $3.82 \pm 0.63$ ) showed agreement about their personal knowledge on these aspects. Both studies showed correlations of SK of healthy foods with lifestyle habits and during food choices. Although literature support the importance of OK regarding healthy foods it did not feature in any of these associations.

**Conclusions:** Both studies show a significant correlation between SK regarding healthy foods and healthy lifestyle and during food choices. Respondents have good OK regarding healthy foods however, it is rather their SK that translates into actual behaviour.

### **Biography: Hanli de Beer**

Hanli de Beer completed a Ph.D. (Microbiology). Basic food knowledge was obtained through the BSc (Agric) Food Science, strengthened with a master's degree (M. Tech (Environmental Health)). Currently she is a lecturer in Food and Food product development at Consumer Sciences (NWU) and was involved over several years in various research projects on food labelling, household food security and decision-making in the retail. Various consumer driven food product development projects especially aiming at the lower-end consumer were undertaken. The potential of a recent project is currently under investigation for commercialisation.