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University students attitudes towards the use of food nutrition labels (FNL) for healthy food choices

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Providing nutritional information on food is an important step in assisting consumers to make an informed judgment on healthful food choice. This study explored university students' attitudes towards nutrition information on food labels. Self-Administered structured questionnaires were used to investigate awareness and frequency of food nutrition label (FNL) use among 486 students aged 20 and 40 years old stratified by level of study (undergraduate and postgraduate) across six Universities in the Western part of Nigeria. Statistical analyses were done using descriptive statistics and regression tests. Results indicated respondents' opinion of food labels as expiry date (93.3%), nutritional information (42%) and legal requirement (52.6 %). Health status assessed by Body mass index (BMI) was moderately associated with the use of FNL in making food choices. Approximately 15% (<18.5) 29% (18.5 to 24.9), 43% (25 < BMI ≤ 30) and 13% (BMI >30) of participants were respectively of normal weight, overweight and obese. The highly significant association was observed among the study level of students and knowledge about FNL in making healthy food choice (p<0.05). The regression analysis showed that three variables predicted attitude to use of FNL for food choices namely, busy lecture schedules (p-value = 0.000) peer influence (p-value = 0.004) and health consciousness (p-value = 0.035). Understanding nutrition information on food labels is mainly related to nutrition knowledge. Data from this study showed both age and level of the student are positively (p<0.05).associated with nutritional food label use in selecting healthy food choice. The results of this study have useful applications in educating University students on nutrition food labels to assist them in making use of these labels for healthy food choices.

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