Men and older adults less likely to use specific foods to improve health

What did the researchers do?
Over 1000 people who were part of a consumer food panel filled out a 30 minute online survey. Age, gender, and education levels were similar to those of the entire city of Guelph.

The survey asked people about their health and health concerns, their eating habits, their feelings about functional foods and motivations for choosing them, and whether they had bought any of nine functional foods in the last year. Results were analyzed for patterns or trends using a statistical method called "Poisson regression".

What did the researchers find?
People who felt healthier reported eating a healthier diet, preferred novelty in foods, and were more likely to be female and university educated. People who chose to eat functional ingredients felt healthier, were more worried about getting sick and felt more positively about functional foods. People ate functional ingredients because they wanted to have better performance and wellbeing, and because they preferred novelty in foods.

However, people who reported following a healthy diet were less likely to choose functional ingredients, perhaps because they did not feel a need for improved nutrition. Men and older participants were less likely to choose functional ingredients.

What you need to know:
Men, older adults, and those following a healthy diet are less likely to choose foods with functional ingredients, such as probiotics and omega-3 fatty acids.

People who feel positively about functional foods and who want to increase their performance and wellbeing are more likely to choose these ingredients in foods.

How can you use this research?
Marketers can use this research to better reach the target market for products with these functional ingredients.

Policymakers can use this research to encourage consumers to make healthier choices.

Governments can use this research to design policies surrounding food, nutrition and health.

Researchers can use this research to assess the health hazards and benefits of functional foods.
Functional foods and drinks can lead to improved health or can stop poor health from developing. For example, probiotics, often found in yoghurt, can improve gut health. As another example, omega 3-fatty acids, found in salmon and walnuts, can prevent heart attacks. Probiotics and omega 3-fatty acids are examples of functional ingredients. Yoghurt and salmon are examples of functional foods.

This study looked at the factors that predict whether people will choose food and drinks that have ingredients that provide more than basic nutrition. The researchers also looked at factors that predict how people feel about their own health.

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