

Healthy Food Shopping: Nutrition Knowledge and Its Implications on Food Shopping of Community Dwelling Older Adults

Purpose of the Study

- 1) To examine food shopping behaviors of people age 65 and older
- 2) To explore the needs and wants of the market segment age 65 and older in food shopping.
- 3) To investigate whether and to what extent the older adult population obtains and utilizes their nutrition knowledge when they shopped for food.

Introduction

Food Shopping of Older Adults

Problems with food shopping of older adults have been identified in previous studies. Difficulties in seeing labels, large package sizes, low temperature in stores, difficulties using carts, difficulties using public transportations and difficulties reaching shelves have been addressed (Leighton & Seaman, 1997; Hare, 2003; Wallis, 1994).

Nutrition Knowledge & Food Shopping

Older adults have been identified as a group that particularly has monotonous and nutritionally inadequate diets (Drewnowski, Ahlstrom-Henderson, Driscoll, & Rolls, 1997). Social isolation, low income, impaired health and low levels of physical activity have contributed to these unhealthy eating habits and nutritional status (Drewnowski et al., 1997). In addition, nutrition knowledge can influence eating habits and food choices. Glanz, Basil, Maibach, (1999). Wardle, Parmenter and Waller (2000) revealed that nutrition knowledge was related to food shopping behavior. Povey, Conner, Sparks, James, and Shepherd (1998) found that older adults did not accurately perceive "healthy" eating, with many perceiving their diet to be more or less healthy than it actually was.

Method

A purposive sampling was used. The data was collected using a semi-structured in-depth interview, conducted by one interviewer at the participants' place of residences. Interviews were tape recorded and then transcribed.

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Results

Twenty-six older adults (24 female; 2 male) volunteered for a one-time interview. The ages ranged from 65-84. Participants either lived alone (n=14) or lived with a spouse (n=12). Participants lived at senior housing establishments (n=10) or independently in their own homes (n=16). All participants were retired.

Recurrent themes were derived using content analysis.

Food Shopping Behavior Types

Planned impulse shopper

- Older adults planned trips on a regular basis: usually once a week (85%)
- Older adults planned food choices by preparing a list (96%); however half of those that used their list also bought items not on their list
- The majority (77%) of participants sought out better food buys while in the store, even if the items were not be on their list.
- 19% of participants ate something prior to food shopping or while in the store in order curb hunger, which implied caused them to increase impulse food purchases.

Value shopper

- All but one participant used the advertisements in the paper prior to food shopping as a guide for food shopping
- Participants (53%) used the ads that are available in the paper to prepare their list or meals
- Participants (81%) used the unit price sign to choose which foods to buy which influenced their buying decision.
- Half of the participants indicated they sometimes cut out coupons for use prior to food shopping, the other half of participants never cut coupons & stated that it was often an annoyance to wait for others using coupons in the checkout lines.

Loyal shopper.

- Older adults (85%) shopped the same route at the same store (77%) that was located close to their home with friendly employees.
- Familiarity with the store layout and products provided at the food store of choice by the participants significantly (69%) influenced why participants chose a particular store.
- Older adults were loyal to a store if the store provided them with extra convenience. A majority (69%) food shopped on Wednesdays which were deemed "Senior Day" since the store was often less busy and transportation was provided to and from the store in some locations around the community.

Food Choice Behavior

- Quality (73%), price (62%) and freshness (54%) were the three most important aspects of food when older adults chose a food item.
- Health and nutrition was important for 46% of participants.
- 85% of participants looked at the nutrition facts panel located on food items.
- Only 15% chose items based on nutrition facts panels, labels or because an item was "healthy,"
- Participants believed they did not need to learn any new food shopping behaviors or skills for healthy eating.

Eating Behavior

- Older adults believed their meals were well balanced in terms of nutrition with no interest to learn more.
- A majority (62%) of the participants assessed their menus or food choices for nutritional balance by believing that if there was protein, generally meat in their meal, along with vegetables that their menus were fairly well balanced.

Implications

The store ads could provide an opportunity for the food retailers to advertise more food items and non-food items such as services. Food retailers could promote both their products and healthy meal plans by suggesting meals plans based on nutrition balances in their ads and offer special discounts on the needed items for the suggested meals. It would be beneficial for food retailer chains to ensure that each store layout is similar to retain or attract shoppers with familiarity in different locations. Food retailers should focus on consistent employee service, and training to retain older adults.

References

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