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Sources of Nutritional Information among Adults

Maryam Hamidianshirazi[1,2], Maryam Ekramzadeh[2*], Mehran Nouri[1,3]

1. Student Research Committee, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Shiraz, Iran
2. Nutrition Research Center, Department of Clinical Nutrition, School of Nutrition and Food Sciences, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Shiraz, Iran
3. Department of Community Nutrition, School of Nutrition and Food Sciences, Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, Shiraz, Iran

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**Corresponding author:*
Maryam Ekramzadeh, PhD;
Nutrition Research Center,
Department of Clinical Nutrition,
School of Nutrition and Food Sciences,
Shiraz University of Medical Sciences,
Shiraz, Iran.
Tel: +98-71-37251004
Email: mekramzade@gmail.com.
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ABSTRACT

Background: Diet-related information, behaviors, and attitudes are significant factors for building healthier nutritional patterns and preventing diseases.This study aimed to investigate the people's preference of sources of nutritional information and the most effective sources.

Methods: This descriptive online study was conducted in Shiraz, Iran. Recruitment of the participants was started in February 2020 and ended in March 2020. All 235 male and female participants were enrolled using simple randomization. Demographic variables and nutritional information sources were collected by an online questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of two parts including the first part containing demographic questions and the mostly used sources of nutritional information according to priority and the second part consisted of 12 questions about the most effective nutritional sources. Continuous data with normal distribution were expressed in number (%), and qualitative variables were assessed by Chi-Square test.

Results: The most common and effective sources of nutritional information among the paricipants were social media (87%) and Instagram (41%), respectively. There was a significant difference between age and level of education in selecting effective sources of information ($p \leq 0.001$, $p \leq 0.001$, respectively).

Conclusion: Social media was recognized as the most effective source of nutritional information. In addition, more comprehensive studies that can survey all the influential factors in this field were suggested.

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Introduction

Nutritional knowledge (1) and healthy eating play a vital role in health maintenance (2, 3) and components to prevent or treat disease (2, 4-6). Reliable nutritional information allows people make appropriate food choices (7). Eating habits and attitudes are influenced by nutritional knowledge (1, 8). Reliable nutritional information allows people make appropriate food and diet (1, 9-11) choices (7). Sources of information include media, health professionals, physicians, friends and family members, the Internet, and books (12-19). Food labels help individuals to make informed food choices (8, 12). Various factors (age, economical status, level of education, and even illness) affect the preference of nutritional information sources (20, 21).

The role of the dietician is important in choosing

information, with the ability to gather data quickly (18). The second source of food nutritional information was television.

The largest source of media messages about nutrition to Brazilian is Digital television (13, 29). Also, the effects of social media and family were in the fourth and fifth grades, respectively (13). TV programs have a significant power on people's behavior (30), so it is important in selecting appropriate programs on nutritional information in Iranian population, its determinants and its association with food consumption. The strength point of this research was investigateing nutritional information in Iranian population for the first time. Sources of nutritional information were randomly selected by experts (31). However, our data indicated that the majority of educated people chose the social media as the most effective sources of nutritional information.

Although educated people use primary health care, physicians are not the first source of nutritional information, which indicates that they can follow the information, because they have better tools to do so (13). Social media are of the highest quality compared to other options. On the other hand, Percheski's (19) study showed that social media may be used as a complementary source of nutritional information. The sources of nutritional information were different in various age groups. Several factors (age, economical status, level of education, and even illness) affect the utilization and preference of nutrition information sources (20, 21). Healthcare providers are considered the most reliable source of nutrition information (18, 26). High nutritionist charges may prevent people from visiting them in developing countries (32), so people's preference for nutritional information is related to socioeconomical status (33).

The current study had some limitations. All factors affecting nutritional information were not assessed. We also suggest assessing data on the exact time and quality of nutritional information obtained with the same gender distribution in future studies. Despite the limitations, this study had a large population and was the first study in this field in Shiraz, Iran that could provide valuable information. The present study provided effective strategies for the transmission of information by health professionals to individuals in the community to promote health.

Conclusion

This study has shown that social media are the most effective source of nutritional information. However, there was a significant difference in the choice of nutritional information source in terms of age and level of education.

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Conflict of Interest

None declared.

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