

Abstract

Is the Health Star Rating Being Selectively Displayed on Healthier Packaged Foods? †

Sally Mackay ^{1,*}, Leanne Young ², Teresa Gontijo de Castro ¹, Helen Eyles ^{1,2} and Cliona Ni Mhurchu ²

¹ Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, The University of Auckland, Auckland 1142, New Zealand; t.castro@auckland.ac.nz (T.G.d.C.); h.eyles@auckland.ac.nz (H.E.)

² National Institute for Health Innovation, The University of Auckland, Auckland 1142, New Zealand; leanne.young@auckland.ac.nz (L.Y.); c.nimhurchu@auckland.ac.nz (C.N.M.)

* Correspondence: sally.mackay@auckland.ac.nz; Tel.: +64-21-0242-6760

† Presented at the 2019 Annual Meeting of the Nutrition Society of New Zealand, Napier, New Zealand, 28–29 November 2019.

Published: 13 December 2019

The Health Star Rating (HSR) is a voluntary front-of-pack labelling system. In 2018 the HSR was displayed on 21% of packaged foods and beverages in New Zealand (NZ). If the HSR is selectively displayed on healthier items, consumers have insufficient information to select healthier choices. The difference in mean HSR of products available for sale in NZ supermarkets, by whether or not the HSR displayed on the pack, was analyzed. Results were presented for all products and separately for products sold by dominant companies by market share.

The presence of the HSR for packaged foods and beverages in 2018 was obtained from Nutritrack, a brand-specific food composition database of supermarket products. The companies that manufactured each brand were identified using company websites and the NZ Companies Register. If displayed on pack, the reported HSR was used. If not displayed on pack, the HSR was calculated from data on the nutrition information panel. For some products, the fiber and FVNL points (fruit, vegetable, nut, legumes) was estimated.

Among the packaged foods ($n = 13,704$) the mean HSR (SD) of products displaying the label was 3.2 (1.3) and of those not displaying the label was 2.5 (1.4). The proportion of products with an HSR ≥ 3.5 was 58.6% for products displaying the label and 36.2% for products not displaying the label. Of the 22 dominant companies, six did not display the HSR on products. Of the 16 who displayed the HSR on some products (range 3.3% to 90.1%), for 13 companies the mean HSR of their products when displayed was higher than the mean HSR of products when not displayed on pack.

The HSR system is used selectively by some companies on healthier products. To ensure a level playing field for consumers, the government should require the HSR to be a mandatory on-pack labelling system.



© 2019 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).