

Project Snapshot: Health Professional Response to a Nutrient-Rich Foods Approach to Dietary Guidance
Date: December 2008

Background



The Nutrient-Rich Foods (NRF) approach to healthful eating is based on the long-standing, science-based principle of nutrient density. It shifts the focus from calories alone, “good food/bad food,” or “nutrients to avoid” to a more balanced understanding of the complete nutrient package of foods.

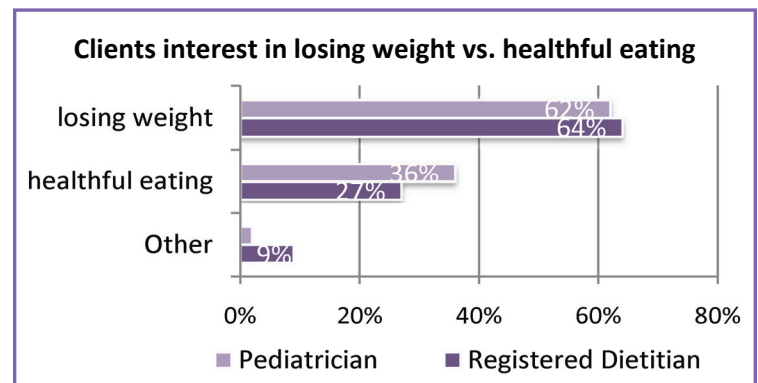
Consumer research indicates that consumers understand this message and embrace it. This research was conducted with registered dietitians and pediatricians to determine their support for the NRF message as well as add credibility to the NRF approach. In addition, this study benchmarks this audience’s awareness and perceptions of the nutrient-rich foods platform and, when repeated over time, will serve as an indicator of the success of NRF as an approach to dietary guidance.

Methodology

An online study was conducted with 250 registered dietitians and 250 pediatricians throughout the country. All respondents were professionals who see/counsel patients about eating and nutrition.

Major Insight

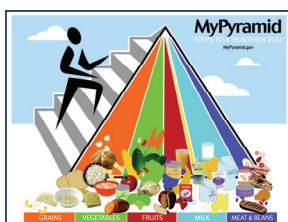
Two-thirds of health professionals claim that the patients they counsel are generally more interested in losing weight than healthy eating. The opportunity to wed the NRF concept with a diet resulting in weight loss is very real if health professionals understand the benefits of nutrient-rich foods can include weight loss as well as more nutrients to fuel a healthy lifestyle.



Key Learnings

- Registered dietitians are aware of the nutrient density approach to dietary guidance (97 percent). They believe the practice of incorporating nutrient-dense foods into one’s daily diet is extremely or very healthful (97 percent).
- Though pediatricians are less aware of the term nutrient density (55 percent) and its definition (71 percent), many believe it is important to get the most nutrients per calorie (81 percent).

- While both audiences believe in the benefits of a nutrient-rich diet, pediatricians are less likely to believe all foods can fit into a healthful diet. Those health professionals who employ *MyPyramid* as a basis for nutrition guidance are more likely to agree that all foods fit and accept the concept of nutrient density.
- While pediatricians and registered dietitians are in general agreement on what nutrients are needed, pediatricians cite iron and protein more frequently while registered dietitians cite fiber, omega 3 fatty acids, vitamin C, potassium and magnesium more frequently.



- Neither audience totally accepts the connection between nutrient avoidance and the incidence within the population of being overweight or obese. Thus, contrasting nutrient density as a better solution than nutrient avoidance for weight issues cannot be the only pillar communicating about the benefits of a nutrient rich counseling approach.

Statements	Registered Dietitians	Pediatricians
Nutrition advice that focuses on telling people what to avoid has been a major contributor to the obesity crisis.	64%	43%
The focus of avoiding foods with fat, sugar and salt has contributed to the development of an overweight and under-nourished population.	62%	44%

- Both groups of health professionals claim their patients are mildly familiar with *MyPyramid*. (Only about one-third are extremely or very familiar.) At the same time, most claim they encourage their patients and clients to use *MyPyramid*. **Health Professional support for *MyPyramid* can be the pathway for incorporating the NRF messages, which clearly works in sync with the *MyPyramid* guidance.**
- Most registered dietitians and pediatricians agree it is better to engage people with information about building a healthier diet before they get into the store.
- All agree that on-package icons and symbols that rate the healthfulness of foods and beverages do not by themselves provide enough information to help consumers build healthy diets. Consumers need a comprehensive education system based on a total diet approach.

Next Steps

- Increase support for the NRF concept with additional science, messaging and education, especially among pediatricians.
- Continue to leverage awareness, credibility and connectedness to *MyPyramid*.
- Support programs that educate the public and the health influencer community about the NRF approach to healthful eating.