

# NUTRIENT CONSIDERATION, PERCEPTION OF NUTRITIONAL CONTENTS, AND CONSUMPTION: THE CASE OF IN-SHELL PEANUTS CONSUMPTION

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**Situation:** The true effect of a nutritional attribute on the consumption of a food product is expressed through its influence on the consumption of those consumers who actually take the nutritional attribute into consideration in making food-consumption decision and have correct knowledge about the food product regarding this nutritional attribute. As for consumers who pay attention to a nutritional attribute in making food-consumption decision but have wrong perceptions about a food product regarding the nutritional attribute, the effect of nutritional consideration actually reflects the effect of a wrong perception about the nutritional attribute.

**Response:** This study explores factors affecting household consumption of in-shell peanuts, with special attention paid to the effects of three nutritional attributes: protein, calories, and saturated fat. The nutritional attribute of saturated fat is included in this study to examine the effect of a seemingly correct, but actually wrong, perception about a nutritional attribute on consumption.

**Results:** The data are from a nationwide telephone survey of household peanut consumption. Information was obtained on the consumption frequency of in-shell peanuts. The survey results show that about 30% of the respondents both frequently take protein into consideration in food consumption and believe in-shell peanuts are rich in protein. The percentage for calories and saturated fat are 23% and 15% respectively.

An ordered probit model was specified to explore factors influencing consumption frequency. The estimation results show that consumer gender, education, ethnic status, and household income are important factors influencing in-shell peanuts consumption.

Nutrition consideration plays an important role in in-shell peanuts consumption. Those who usually take protein into consideration in making food-consumption decision and believe in-shell peanuts to be rich in protein tend to consume the product more frequently. On the other hand, the nutritional attributes of calories and saturated fat are found to be inversely related to the consumption. The effect of saturated fat actually reflects the effect of a wrong perception about the nutrient content of in-shell peanuts because peanuts are rich in unsaturated fat which has been scientifically proved to be beneficial to health, but not saturated fat.

An important implication from this study is that nutritional education is very important. Due to a lack of knowledge about the nutrient contents of a food product, consumers may have wrong perceptions about a nutritional attribute of the product. Wrong perceptions about a nutritional attribute of a food product may affect consumption of the product and efforts should be made to impart correct nutritional information to consumers. As demonstrated in this study, wrong perception about saturated fat discourages the consumption of in-shell peanuts. This implies consumption of in-shell peanuts can be increased by imparting correct nutritional information to consumers, telling them the fat contained in peanuts is mostly beneficial unsaturated fat, and hence dispelling their unfounded concerns about an excessive intake of saturated fat from consumption of peanuts.

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