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Generational differences in disease prevention attitudes and behaviors across Canada: The case of functional foods

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If consumed regularly for appropriate reasons, functional foods (ex., foods with omega-3, antioxidants, probiotics) could potentially help reduce the incidence of chronic diseases in ageing populations. Their effectiveness in disease prevention depends on their adoption at younger ages and continued use over time. This study assesses generational differences in attitudes and consumption of functional foods. A random sample of Canadians from a reputable research firm's internet panel (N=1,151) responded to a questionnaire regarding attitudes towards and consumption of various functional foods. Bivariate statistics reveal distinct generational differences. Older generations are most interested in functional foods, but are less likely to believe that foods should have medicinal properties or can help prevent illness. Older generations are buying more traditional functional foods, such as foods high in fiber or calcium, while younger generations are buying more probiotic foods. The WWII generation claimed higher knowledge of which foods might prevent specific illnesses, but their generation is less likely to be able to prevent illnesses by consuming functional foods. Younger generations could profit more from functional foods, but claim to be less knowledgeable about them and are most worried that they could cause health problems. Implications for Canadian health policy are discussed.