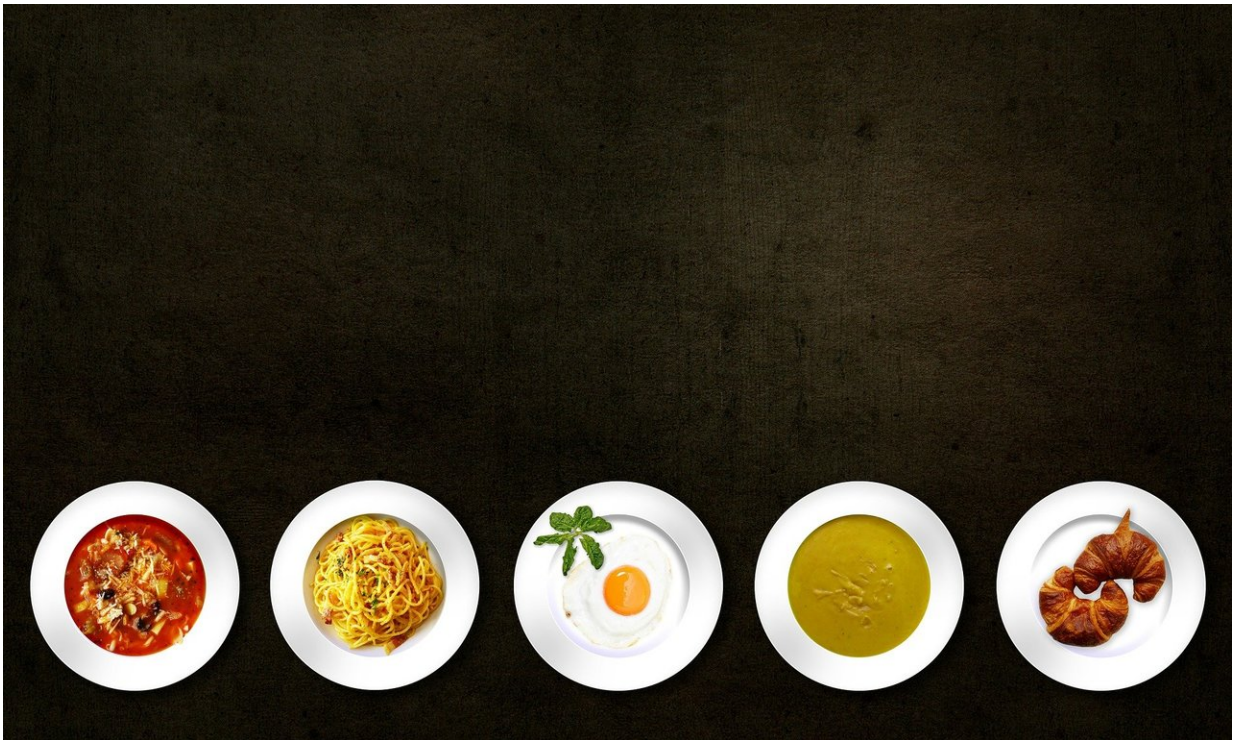


# Consumers view nutrition and health claims differently than regulators

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Consumers may not consciously differentiate nutrition and health claims on foods in the way that regulatory experts do, new research published in the journal *Nutrients* reports.

During this unique study an international team of researchers led by the

University of Surrey investigated whether consumers in the United Kingdom, Slovenia, Germany, Spain and the Netherlands were able to differentiate between the various [health](#) and nutrition claims on [food items](#) that are required by EU regulation.

Regulations, such as the Nutrition and Health Claims Regulation EC No 1924/2006, seek to eliminate unsubstantiated and potentially misleading claims from about foods and provide an appropriate level of consumer protection. This regulation differentiates between nutrition claims (i.e. a claim that states that a [food](#) contains a particular element) and health claims (i.e. claims implying a health benefit of consuming a food).

The level of evidence needed to support a health claim is more extensive as it needs to substantiate that the health benefit exists. However, there is doubt as to whether consumers make a distinction between these two types of claims.

Results show that consumers may not consciously differentiate between a nutrition claim and a health claim in the way that regulatory experts do. Researchers found that consumers' pre-determined beliefs about nutrients and their relationship with health outcomes are key drivers in the way they interpret and understand claims. When nutrients in the claim are familiar and personally relevant to the consumer there is the potential for them to 'upgrade' the nutrition claims to health claims simply based on their previous knowledge.

Researchers believe that regulators need to consider making information available to ensure [consumers'](#) knowledge and beliefs are correct and well-informed so they can understand and respond appropriately to claims in the marketplace.

Professor Monique Raats, Director of the Food, Consumer Behaviour and Health Research Centre at the University of Surrey, who led the

research, said: "Labelling [food products](#) with [health claims](#) could help people make better food choices but what we have found is that they don't always interpret claims in the way we assume they do. It is important that consumer perspectives are taken into consideration when developing policy."

**More information:** Charo Hodgkins et al. Understanding How Consumers Categorise Health Related Claims on Foods: A Consumer-Derived Typology of Health-Related Claims, *Nutrients* (2019). [DOI: 10.3390/nu11030539](https://doi.org/10.3390/nu11030539)

Provided by University of Surrey

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