

Gluten-Free Lifestyle

Not only are athletes (a great majority of endurance athletes) electing to adopt (by choice, without formal medical diagnosis) a gluten-free diet/lifestyle (GFDL) but the general public adherence to GFDL grew 28% between 2008-2012 (Lis, Stellingwerff, Shing, Ahuja, & Fell, 2015). Lis et al. (2015) found that the decision to adopt GFDL was based on a self-diagnosed "gluten issue" in over half of the cases. "Free-from" products (e.g. gluten-free, sugar-free) have been gaining wide popularity, and they are a driving force in the consumer market (Priven, Baum, Vieira, Fung, & Herbold, 2015).

Products marked "free-from" influence consumers' perception of the healthfulness (POH) of the product (Priven et al., 2015). The POH of a product also increased if the consumer was more familiar with the health claim, and if the consumer could identify with the product (i.e. relevance, have a personal stake in the marketed health claim) (Priven et al., 2015). The concept of perceived risk was identified as an important factor in the purchasing decision (Priven et al., 2015). If a product was perceived as risky, consumers were less likely to purchase it; likewise, if a product was perceived to "reduce the risk of [something]" then consumers were more encouraged to buy it (Priven et al., 2015).

Gluten is perceived as "risky"; therefore, "gluten-free" have been very popular (Priven et al., 2015). Priven et al. (2015) created a fictitious "MUI-free" label and put it on one of two identical boxes of crackers to study consumers' reactions. Priven et al. (2015) study demonstrated that the "free-from" label increased POH even without additional information about the proposed "risk". "Free-from" label designations could be successfully manipulated by marketing in order to sway customers (Priven et al., 2015). Priven et al. (2015) also noted that women were more influenced by "free-from" products.

Even though clients may be incredibly savvy and experienced, it is always worth opening a dialogue on their consumer choices, especially with "free-from" products. I think that without insulting a client's intelligence, it is possible to discuss and identify products' claims versus what research/evidence seems to indicate--the decision is still left to the client in the end.

References

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