



ABSTRACT

Recent opinions of EFSA on health claims

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In the EU health claims register (1) a total of 2310 health claims have been entered after a scientific evaluation by the NDA Panel of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). Of these health claims 259 are authorized for use in marketing of foods with health claims. In recent evaluations since 2015, EFSA has evaluated the scientific substance of health claims on several vitamins with the target group being children as well as on various claims regarding for example lactic acid bacteria, constituents claimed as antioxidants, long chain unsaturated fatty acids, different carbohydrates, protein constituents, and various plant extracts. These foods or food constituents have been considered as defined and characterized as is the first criteria stated in the updated health claims guidances (2, 3). The second step is to evaluate whether the claim is beneficial to human health and can be measured in vivo in humans. According to the recent EFSA opinions, immune defence against pathogens in the gastrointestinal (GI) tract and upper respiratory tract (URT) as well as toward reactivation of herpes simplex virus, reduction of GI discomfort, protection of DNA, proteins and lipids from oxidative damage, cognitive functions, decrease of post prandial glucose, improvement of muscle strength, maintenance of normal immune system, normal defecation, improvement of non-haem iron absorption, and maintenance of normal blood pressure are beneficial to human health. As the third step EFSA considers whether a cause and effect relationship is established between the consumption of the food or food constituent and the claimed effect in humans (for the target group under the proposed conditions of use), by considering the strength, consistency, specificity, dose–response, and biological plausibility of the relationship. Regarding various claims on immune system, only with claims on nutrients such as iron and vitamins C and D has the cause and effect relationship been established while the claim on low fat fermented milk with combination of fructo-oligosaccharides and live *Lactobacillus rhamnosus* GG (ATCC 53103), *Streptococcus thermophilus* (Z57)



and *Lactobacillus delbrueckii* subsp. and reactivation of herpes simplex virus has not been established. A claim on normal defecation was accepted for lactitol but not for polydextrose nor for short chain fructo-oligosaccharides. A claim on creatine and resistance training and improvement in muscle strength in adults over the age of 55 has been evaluated with favourable outcome. The scientific substantiation regarding *Lactobacillus paracasei* CBA L74 and immune defence against pathogens in the GI tract and URT was considered insufficient as was the data concerning *L. plantarum* 299v and increase of non-haem iron absorption, beta-galactosidase and reduction of GI discomfort, and a root extract of *Echinacea angustifolia* and lowering the subthreshold and mild anxiety. If insufficient, the claimed effect may be based on one study only with no replication in other studies or with contradictory findings, and there may be no evidence for plausible mechanism. No recent claims on cognitive functions including memory functions or reading ability, maintenance of blood pressure, or antioxidant function (other than vitamins) have been accepted.

- (1) http://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/labelling_nutrition/claims/register/public/?event=register.home
- (2) Scientific and technical guidance for the preparation and presentation of a health claim application (Revision 2). EFSA Journal 2017;15(1):4680
<http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/4680>
- (3) General scientific guidance for stakeholders on health claim applications. EFSA Journal 2016;14(1):4367. <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/pub/4367>

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