

# Interactive Diffusion of Knowledge about Nutrition to Consumers on the WWW : The Experience of NutriWeb Magazine

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**Background.** The number of consumers who look for information about diets, nutrition and fitness on the Internet is growing steadily. However, according to the American Dietetic Association (ADA)<sup>1</sup>, TV and magazines are still the main sources of information in this area, with 48% and 47%, respectively; while the Internet represents only 6%. This and other surveys have demonstrated the importance of consumer-oriented health publications for defining the behavior in relation to nutrition as one of the factors, which improve their health.

It is well known that the open nature of Internet makes possible the publication of any kind of material, including those with no scientific value. This has been a cause of great concern in the scientific community. Research carried out about the quality of nutrition information which is available on the WWW has shown that up to 45% of it doesn't fulfill the recommendations of main health care institutes<sup>2</sup>. It is also important to emphasize that, according to the ADA survey<sup>1</sup>, up to 22% of people who read nutrition news are confused about their informational content.

In view of all this, i.e.; 1) the increase in demand for nutrition information, 2) the enormous growth of Internet as a health information source for consumers, and 3) concern with the quality of information and its comprehensibility for a varied target public; we have developed an on-line interactive magazine about nutrition with the following main objectives : 1) to disseminate basic knowledge on nutrition for the non-specialist public; 2) to facilitate access to information and navigation via a friendly interface (Java scripts, animations) and using better navigation tools; and 3) to promote the education of readers by means of a clear and objective language.

**Description of the System.** The NutriWeb magazine is exclusively on-line (<http://www.epub.org.br/nutriweb>), has free of charge access, and is presently being published only in Portuguese, every two months. It is divided into the sections: Breastfeeding, Infant Nutrition, Athletic Nutrition, Clinical Nutrition, Nutrition Calculations, Obesity, Nutritional Guidelines, Health Tips, Nutrition News (these are

updated every 15 days) and Reader in Focus; a section with questions sent by readers, with their respective answers. The topics are chosen according to the main current subjects of interest in nutrition and health, considering also the suggestions given by readers, who can communicate with the editors by means of a Web form. The active participation of readers has shown some interesting results, such as : 1) most of the e-mails comprise requests for diets. This means that these consumers have a serious lack of knowledge about the nutritionist's role, as well as about the dangers that a bad diet management may cause, and its corresponding legal issues; 2) Many of the readers are trying to solve their personal problems, such as : eating disorders in the family, nutritional education, improvement of athletic performance, etc.. The site also offers JavaScript-based nutritional calculation tools, such as: Body Mass Index, Caloric Expenditure in Exercise, among others.

**Discussion.** Our experience has proved to be very promising, with a great number of daily accesses and a constant increase of subscribers what increases our responsibility to providing correct information. It is expected that initiatives such as the NutriWeb Magazine contribute to divulge the subject among nutrition professionals, and that Internet is an excellent tool to learn, educate and communicate new ideas<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, health professionals must have an active role in this technology, developing strategies to guarantee the quality of information and to ensure a reference to improve public health.

## References

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