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NUTRACEUTICALS AND FUNCTIONAL FOODS: THEIR ROLE IN HUMAN HEALTH PROMOTION AND DISEASE PREVENTION

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In recent years there is an increasing attention in functional food and nutraceuticals which provide health benefits and are alternative to modern medicine. Nutrients, herbals and dietary supplements are major constituents of nutraceuticals which make them instrumental in maintaining health, act against various disease conditions and thus promote the quality of life. Various studies have linked functional foods as helpful in combating a number of degenerative diseases; as such, a lot of research on functional attributes linked directly to the health benefits of various plant and animal foods has been observed in recent years. Consumption of bioactive ingredients in fruits and vegetables has been linked to help combat diseases such as cancer, cardiovascular diseases, obesity, and gastrointestinal tract disorders. Although huge number of naturally occurring health-enhancing compounds are of plant origin, there are a number of physiologically active constituents in animal products as well that merit attention for their potential role in best health. Marine foods have frequently been considered as "heart food" because of their omega-3 constituents which are recognized to lower

blood triacylglycerol and, possibly, cholesterol levels. Therefore, food factors from both plants and animals may be participating in human health promotion. Besides, linking the consumption of functional foods and nutraceuticals with health claims should be based on sound scientific confirmation. However, not all foods on the market today that are claimed to be functional foods are supported by enough solid data and research to merit such claims. The aim of this paper is to provide an extensive overview of the clinical aspects of functional foods and nutraceuticals. It contains information on both nutritional challenges and potential health benefits of functional foods and nutraceuticals. Hence, it categorizes a variety of functional foods according to the type of evidence supporting their functionality, the strength of that evidence and the recommended intakes.

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