

## FORMATION OF HEALTHY FOOD SKILLS AT SCHOOL CHILDREN

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*Healthy food habits acquired at early ages have positive effects throughout the life. The present work is a survey on food habits of schoolchildren in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade from Timișoara, on a sample of 1220 persons, of which 53.3% girls and 44.6% boys, the rest of 2.1% being non-answers. Out of these, 4.1% follow a low calorie diet, 3.3% follow a low fat diet and only 1.2% follow a diet rich in fibres; 0.2% already follow a diabetic diet and 0.2% a diet for lactose intolerance. The fact that the number of children eating food poor in calories and rich in fats is very small raises questions on the correctness of their nourishment. There are still schoolchildren suffering from diabetes or lactose intolerance. That is the reason why the present work aims at drawing the differences between the correct nourishing norms as recommended by the Ministry of Public Health and the bad habits of pre-teenagers in Timișoara, with a view to establish certain marketing strategies for the formation of healthy food skills as well as some information sessions for parents and children on the serious consequences of inadequate, unhealthy food.*

**Key words:** food consumption, food habits, food marketing

Adolescence is a decisive stage for the physical construction of future adults. Adolescence ranges between the age of 13—15 years and coincides with puberty. The age between 16 - 19 years old coincides with the post-puberty when the individual is submitted to deep transformations: rapid physical, intellectual and neuro-endocrine development and intensification of vital functions. The body goes through major metabolic and endocrine changes. Adolescence is also the age of serious food disorders, such as: obesity, bulimia and anorexia. Under these circumstances, healthy food is of utmost importance for the correct development of teenagers. Parents, the school, mass-media, the whole society must assume this responsibility, in order to provide children a future with no diseases. Food studies meant for forming correct food habits and information programs on the consequences of inadequate food at teenagers are necessary. [1,4,8]

### MATERIAL AND METHOD

The research process made use of traditional research methods and techniques: analysis of scientific literature, marketing evaluation techniques such as the questionnaires. Data processing used statistic and graphic analysis methods.

The information basis is ensured by scientific literature and methodology of the domain under evaluation, laws and regulations in force, information provided by the local Authority for Public Health as well as by the results of own investigations. [2,8]

The survey was applied on a sample of 1220 local schoolchildren from the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, of which a small percentage of 1.2 are internal pupils.

Most of them (87.3%) live in Timișoara and the rest in the other towns and villages of Timiș County; a number of 1048 (70.4%) live in condominiums and 22.3% in houses with all utilities included.

The majority of the children do not follow any food diet, but there are still many children who are obliged to keep a diet, 0.2% follow a diabetes diet and 0.2% a diet for lactose intolerance.

The diets followed by children are mostly kept upon the recommendation of the family doctor (2.3%) or the medical specialist (1.7%); 6.7% of schoolchildren have decided to keep a diet by themselves and 39 children followed their mother's advice.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

By analysing the answers received, the following categories of food have been identified in the children's regular menu:

- fruits are consumed daily or several times a day in a percentage of 65.4%, 2.3% consume fruits rarely and very rarely; vegetables are consumed daily or several times a day (31.7%), 17.5% consume vegetables rarely and very rarely;
- grease is consumed daily or several times a day in a percentage of 1.7%, and 88.9% consume grease rarely and very rarely; edible oil is consumed daily or several times a day (35.2%), 21.8% consume oil rarely and very rarely; olive oil is consumed daily or several times a day in a percentage of 8.4% and 60.8% consume olive oil rarely and very rarely; butter is consumed daily or several times a day in a percentage of 25.7%, 37.6% consume butter rarely and very rarely; margarine is consumed daily or several times a day in a percentage of 39.5%, and 23.5% consume margarine rarely and very rarely;
- chicken is consumed daily or several times a day in a percentage of 11.5%, and 15% consume chicken rarely and very rarely; beef is consumed daily or several times a day in a percentage of 2.9%, and 66.4% consume beef rarely and very rarely; pork is consumed daily or several times a day in a percentage of 8.2%, and 49.9% consume pork rarely and very rarely; mutton is consumed daily or several times a day in a percentage of 1.6%, and 89.5% consume mutton rarely and very rarely; fish is consumed daily or several times a day in a percentage of 4.1%, and 64% consume fish rarely and very rarely;
- white bread is consumed daily or several times a day in a percentage of 84.5%, and 6.6% consume white bread rarely and very rarely; whole-meal bread is consumed daily or several times a day in a percentage of 12.3% and 62.9% consume whole-meal bread rarely and very rarely;

- pastry is consumed daily or several times a day in a percentage of 9.3%, and 37.8% consume pastry rarely and very rarely;
- sweets are consumed daily or several times a day in a percentage of 39.3%, and 15.8% consume sweets rarely and very rarely; chocolate is consumed daily or several times a day in a percentage of 32.7%, and 13.5% consume chocolate rarely and very rarely; honey is consumed daily or several times a day in a percentage of 20.1%, and 44.6% consume honey rarely and very rarely;
  - cow milk is consumed daily or several times a day in a percentage of 47.7%, and 19.8% consume milk rarely and very rarely; dairy products are consumed daily or several times a day in a percentage of 27.5% and 30.9% consume dairy products rarely and very rarely;
  - soft drinks are consumed daily or several times a day in a percentage of 42.3%, and 18.9% of children consume soft drinks rarely and very rarely; natural juices are consumed daily or several times a day in a percentage of 29.4%, and 24.9% consume natural juice rarely and very rarely.

Food habits of schoolchildren are just partially conforming to healthy food requirements. Few children use to eat low calorie food (4.1%), low fat food (3.3%) rich in fibres, necessary to a correct digestion (1.2%).

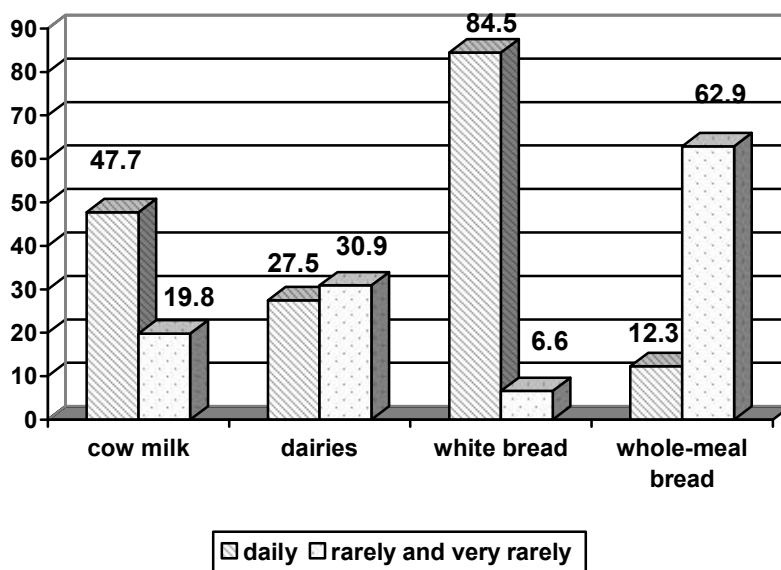


Figure 1 Milk and cereals consumption (%)

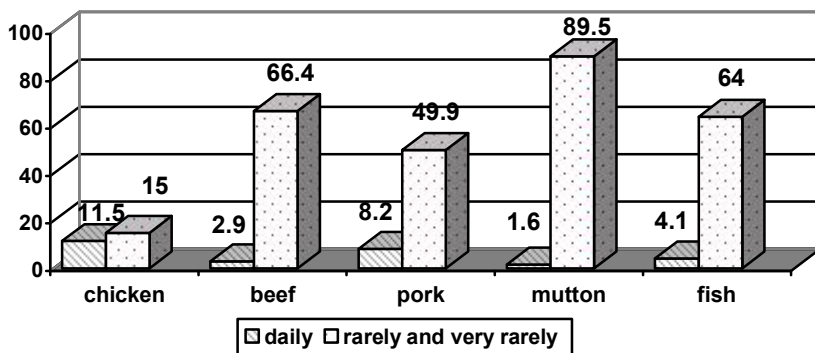


Figure 2 Meat consumption (%)

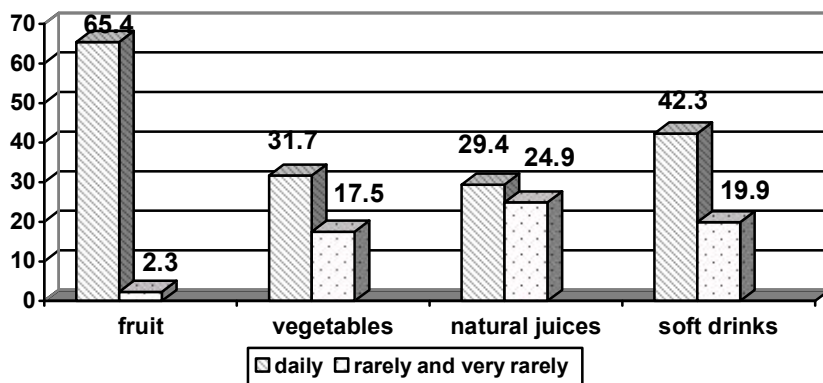


Figure 3 Fruit, vegetables and beverages consumption (%)

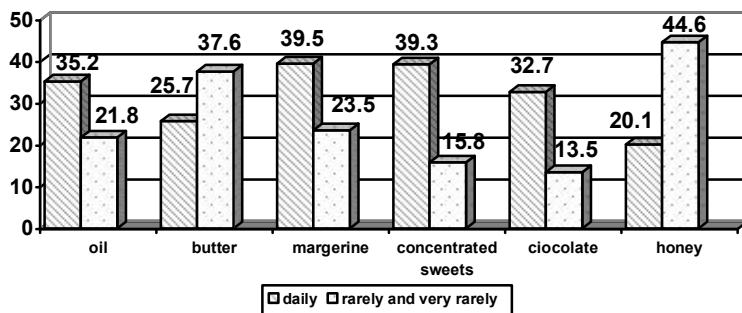


Figure 4 Fats and sweets consumption (%)

The teenagers' diet lacks proteins because of the low protein content of animal food. The meat consumption is rather small, the mostly consumed meat being chicken and pork but in small quantities.

The food system specific to the Romanian population is mostly based on milk and cereals, fact that proves the subsistence character of agriculture in

Romania. On the contrary, Romanian people eat great quantities of fruits and vegetables, much above the average in the EU countries.

For the food preparation, Romanians use many fats: oil, margarine, butter, grease. For cooking, the mostly used are: oil (87.4%), butter or margarine (5.1%), grease (0.4 %), oil and grease (1.1%)

Children consume too many soft drinks, concentrated sweets and chocolate. According to health regulations, the necessary of saccharides must be taken from fruits and less from over refined sugar.

Saccharides will be provided by consuming bread, pastry, fruits and vegetables, then sugar and concentrated sweets.

Children consume too many white bread comparatively whole-meal bread.

For their diet, schoolchildren must be advised to avoid eating too much bread, candies and cakes which represent, most of the times, the cause for dyspeptic troubles and for tooth decays.

The necessary quantity of high quality proteins comes mostly from meat, milk, eggs and food of vegetal origin.

Lipids will be provided by constitution fats and by food fats, butter or other animal fats.

Fats are obligatory in schoolchildren's diet, but in small and selected quantities. The fats of vegetal origin are preferable to the animal ones (cream, butter) as they are important sources of essential fat acids.

Natural juices and soft drinks are allowed and even recommended but in moderate quantities and at the proper time (after the meal and not before or during the meal). [5,6,9]

## CONCLUSIONS

Bad food habits acquired at an early age may lead to degenerative chronic diseases as: diabetes, gastro duodenal ulcer, atherosclerosis, obesity, dislipidemies.

To study food habits, food structure and nourishment state of the population has always been useful.

Such studies may bring to common knowledge the errors related to the quantity and quality of food rations and may contribute to elaborating nutritional training and information programs to be associated to school activities.

In order for the teenagers to learn how to eat safely, here are some nutritional advices to be constitute the fundamentals of the nutritional policy:

- eat diversified food to get energy, proteins, vitamins, minerals and fibres for your good health;
- provide the teenagers with food rich in calories and nutritive elements, such as: meat, vegetables, fruits, milk and dairy products with no cooked fats, sausages or canned food;
- choose a low sugar diet with high content of calories and low content of nutrients to avoid tooth decays;

- choose a diet rich in cereals, vegetables and fruits, which provides you the necessary trophines and reduce the fats;
- choose a low saturated fat and cholesterol diet to prevent heart and vascular diseases;
- to eat rationally means to have reasonable quantities of milk, whole-meal bread, fresh fruit, fresh or boiled vegetables, meat and fish.

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