



ATTITUDES AND AWARENESS OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS ABOUT HEALTHY EATING AND BEHAVIOR

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ABSTRACT:

Social networks, television, and mass media are spread diverse and attractively presented information about food, diets, and culinary shows, which in most cases give not entirely reliable information about diets and products.

Purpose: The Purpose of the study is to establish the attitude and awareness of high school students about healthy eating and behavior.

Methods: The anonymous survey involved 111 students (59 girls and 52 boys) aged 15 to 19 randomly selected.

Results: The survey found that half of the students are familiar with the basic principles of healthy diet, have followed a diet at least once, prefer to be informed about healthy diet by people who have changed their diet and have achieved optimal health and vision.

A little over half of the respondents want to change their diet in order to lose weight, 31.5% are willing to participate in training on healthy diet, and 40.5% are hesitant. Preferred healthy eating tipsters are athletes (38.7%), medical professionals (36.9%), celebrities (36%), influencers (34.2%) and vloggers (32.4%).

Conclusions: the study found that about half of the surveyed students show an active interest in healthy eating, their main motive is to change their diet in order to improve their appearance and on this occasion, they followed a diet. Conducting active information campaigns to promote healthy eating on the Internet and social networks with the help of people who have achieved good physical shape and optimal level of health will attract more young people to a healthy lifestyle.

Keywords: high school students, education, healthy eating, attitudes, awareness, trainers, diet,

INTRODUCTION

Healthy diet, motor activity and the mode of work and rest of the modern person have changed significantly over the last few decades. The main reasons for these processes relate to the change in eating culture and immobilization. In recent decades, more and more attention has been paid to personal responsibility for health. The pursuit of good health, optimal weight and a balanced diet should begin at an early age.

Social networks, television, and mass media is spread diverse and attractively presented information about food, diets and culinary shows, which in most cases present not entirely reliable information about diets and products.

Young people are some of the main users of the Internet and spend a large part of their free time on the social networking websites. The information they receive on the social networks is not always reliable and harmless to their health. According to UNICEF, harmful marketing reaches more and more children, in just one year children in some countries see 30,000 advertisements on television and this has led to an 11-fold increase in obesity. The massive growth of social media advertising and algorithms targeting children has not yet been sufficiently explored. Predatory marketing of fast food, sugary drinks, junk food aimed at children leads to overweight and obesity among children [1].

The official websites of institutions responsible for public health and a healthy lifestyle are few and often unattractive and without aggressive advertising. The dissemination of information through social networks through cooking programs, commercials, talk shows, debates, panel discussions, etc. can have a positive impact on promoting healthy eating behavior among young people [2].

Continuous efforts should be made to increase the population's awareness of the importance of a healthy lifestyle and a balanced diet. But changes in young people's eating habits need to be explored [3].

The formation of a healthy behaviors among young people must be an active policy of society. The formation of healthy habits in adolescence can prevent many

diseases in adulthood [4].

High school students are on the verge of their independent lives when they are able to take full responsibility for their own health. Balanced nutrition training should be compulsory in schools. The priority of school management should be to promote and promote healthy eating for students [5].

It is necessary to actively study the level of awareness of healthy lifestyles of young people in order to be able to conduct active campaigns by the state and society to form a healthy culture. Students should be taught how to eat healthily in order to acquire the necessary skills for proper food selection to conduct research on the effectiveness of training to improve their eating behavior [6]. A study found that almost half of the students surveyed had unhealthy and unbalanced eating habits and often had insufficient physical activity, and was overweight. [7]. Training by mentors has a positive effect on maintaining and reducing the students' weight. [8]. The school must create conditions for healthy eating to make the consumption of healthy snacks a pleasant experience for students. [9].

The inclusion of healthy food in school stands has a positive effect on students' nutrition, although some of them are indifferent to healthy products, they still buy them therefore, this has a positive effect on their nutrition [10].

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

The aim of the study is to establish the attitude and awareness of high school students about healthy eating and behavior.

Methods: The anonymous survey involved 111 students aged 15 to 19 randomly selected. 59 girls and 52 boys participated in the study.

The survey was conducted in 2021 in the cities of Stara Zagora and Burgas. The questionnaire consists of 13 open-ended and closed-ended questions. The questionnaire is constructed in 3 modules: self-assessment of eating habits and the level of awareness, motivation to improve eating habits and participation in the promotion of healthy eating among peers.

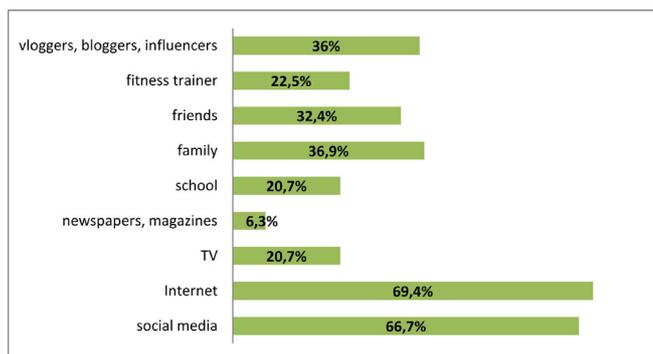
The data are processed with Microsoft Office Excel 2016.

Limitations in the study stem from students' self-assessments, which are often inaccurate and unsystematic. Another limitation is the specifics of the surveyed minors who still lack life experience and are influenced by the subjective assessments of persons and information sources they perceive as authoritative

RESULTS

The study found that 50.5% (n=56) of students were familiar with the basic principles of healthy eating, and 47.7% were partially aware. The most popular sources for information on a healthy diet were posts on the Internet (69.4%, n=77) and social networks (66.7%, n=74). Family (36.9%, n=40) and influencers, vloggers and bloggers (36%, n=40) are also among the sources of information about healthy eating. (fig. 1)

Fig. 1. Sources of information on healthy eating

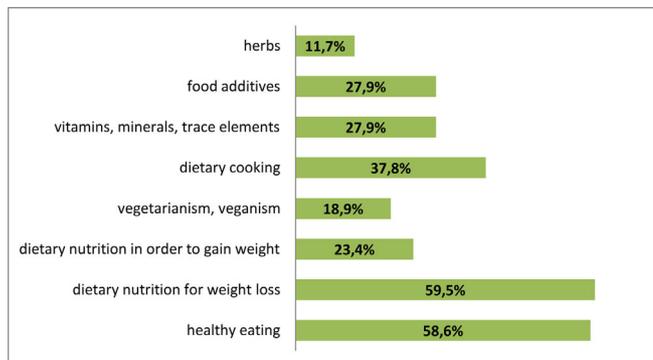


In recent years, maintaining low body weight, flawless skin and hair are accepted as a beauty benchmark among girls. Among boys, musculature and sports figure are the ones accepted as a benchmark for beauty. So we decided to investigate how many of the respondents were subject to these models.

The analysis of the data found that half of the respondents (50.5%, n=56) had followed a diet at least once, 31.5% (n=35) did not, and 18% had started.

Over half of students (54.1%, n=60) wanted to change their diet for weight loss, 50.5% (n=56) to maintain their health, 37.8% (n=42) to have "radiant" skin, 36% (n=40) to model their figure by reducing body fat, 34.2% (n=38) to increase their muscle mass. (fig. 2)

Fig. 2. Desires to change the appearance



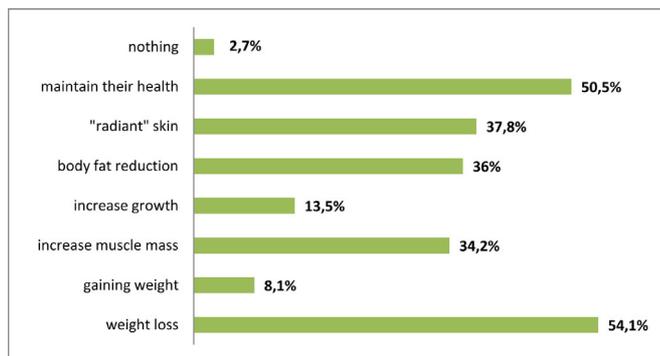
It found that 79% (n=88) of respondents had normal body weight, yet over half of high school, students attempted to change their eating habits in order to look more attractive. Girls (74.4%, n=34) are more likely to start a diet in order to improve their appearance.

In order to have an active, positive attitude towards a healthy lifestyle, students should be motivated to increase their knowledge, form a positive attitude towards maintaining their own health, and not be subject to popular but unreliable sources of information. 30.6% (n=34) of respondents were willing to participate as trainers in such programs. Leading motives for participation as trainers are an increase in their own knowledge (27%) and the desire to be useful to society (27%).*

According to the respondents, the most interesting topics were weight loss diet (59.5%, n=66), basic princi-

ples of healthy eating (58.6%, n=65), and food processing (37.8%, n=42). (fig. 3)

Fig. 3. Topics of healthy eating that interest high school students



For 50.5% (n=56) of students, the preferred lecturers for healthy eating are: people who changed their diet and achieved optimal health and appearance, 38.7% (n=43) preferred athletes, 36.9% (n=41) of physician assistants, 36% (n=40) identified celebrities, and influencers (34.2%, n=36) and vloggers (32.4%, n=36).

DISCUSSION:

In order to ensure healthy nutrition and improve the habits of children in childcare facilities and schools, the state has developed an Ordinance on the specific requirements for the safety and quality of food, proposed in childcare facilities and school canteens, which guarantee the quality of nutrition for students. Despite the regulatory measures taken by state institutions, students in secondary schools choose food at school and sometimes at home by themselves. [11, 12].

Study of the factors forming the health culture and knowledge about balanced nutrition and motivation are the basis of achieving good health through an active attitude and formation of nutritional behavior and habits.

Children's nutritional behavior is influenced by various factors: the environment in which they live, eating patterns and the attitude of the family and children towards eating; external environmental factors – access, marketing and advertising of food, price and quality of food, and production and supply of food.

Studies have found that the family has a leading role in shaping nutritional behavior among young people because adolescence is a period of life in which family, friends, but also the wider social circle plays a role in having a healthy diet (school, coaches) [13, 14, 15]. Parents are aware of their responsibility to form healthy nutritional habits in their children, but often the lack of time and the food market have a negative effect [16].

Schools are still not working actively to improve the health knowledge of their students, although they have developed programs. Teachers do not feel prepared to promote healthy diet [5].

Massive food and drinks advertising campaigns in the mass media influence the nutritional behavior of young people. Imitation of celebrities very often has a negative effect on the nutrition of secondary school students. Diets that are not healthy are often spread in social networks, magazines, and television. In order to achieve a desired vision, young people often undertake the observance of a dietary regime, which often leads to a deterioration of the health status. Being informed about healthy eating does not always lead to the choice of healthy food. Young people often choose their food according to taste preferences [17].

There are worrying trends among young people to determine their own diet in order to maintain a low weight. Diets often include reduced caloric intake, deprivation of one to several meals a day. Girls more often follow this type of unhealthy diets and have psychological problems expressed in an unrealistic self-assessment of their own weight.

In recent years, maintaining low body weight, flawless skin and hair are accepted as a beauty benchmark among girls. Among boys, musculature and sports figure are the ones accepted as a benchmark for beauty. So we decided to investigate how many of the respondents were subject to these models.

Despite their normal weight, high school students tend to observe episodic diets, which can contribute to the development of eating disorders [18, 19].

Understanding how young people perceive healthy food consumption can provide information on how to develop effective programs and policies that improve healthy eating [20].

Understanding the habits of high school students will help to develop appropriate educational programs leading to improved eating habits and physical activity and therefore lead to a longer life in good health [21]. Conducting training among students on proper nutrition and a healthy lifestyle has a positive effect on their eating behavior, physical activity, and organization of free time [22].

Raising the awareness of the importance of a healthy lifestyle and a balanced diet should be a continuous and planned process. In order for the necessary level of awareness among young people about how to eat and live healthily to be achieved, changes in young people's nutritional habits should be studied.

CONCLUSIONS:

The study found that about half of the surveyed students show an active interest in healthy eating, their main motive is to change their diet in order to improve their appearance and on this occasion, they followed a diet. Conducting active information campaigns to promote healthy eating on the Internet and social networks with the help of people who have achieved good physical shape and optimal level of health will attract more young people to a healthy lifestyle. The formation of the

right attitudes and behavior toward a healthy diet should be a purposeful process by the state, educational institutions and society so that young people can maintain and develop their health and workability.

Healthy eating of young people should be a purposeful process. Currently, information on healthy eating is mainly obtained from social networks. State institutions do not have an active policy aimed at promoting health among students. The formation of correct attitudes and behavior for a healthy way of eating should begin in early childhood so that young people can maintain and develop their health and working capacity.

Conducting studies on nutrition, behavior and attitudes towards rational nutrition of students by age

groups should serve to develop educational programs conducted by competent persons and presented in an attractive way. Dissemination of information through credible and authoritative figures for young people, as well as dissemination of health knowledge and knowledge about food and nutritional behavior, creates good conditions for practicing a healthy lifestyle.

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