

DEPENDENCIES BETWEEN THE AWARENESS FOR HEALTHY NUTRITION PRINCIPLES AND THE DIETARY HABITS OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

The awareness of young adults for the principles of healthy nutrition is considered as the first necessary step towards applying them. The aim of this research is to determine the direction and extent to which awareness of the principles of healthy nutrition affects the healthy and eating behavior of young people.

The authors have conducted a survey with 148 healthcare students (46% female and 54% male) at Trakia University, Bulgaria. The empirical data was processed statistically with a social analysis software designed for social sciences studies: SPSS. The statistical analyses performed were mainly dispersion analysis (ANOVA), Pearson correlational analysis, etc.

75% of the respondents were familiar with the principles of healthy nutrition, yet hardly 32% of them applied them regularly. The study found that the statistically significant part of the respondents who were more informed about healthy nutrition were the younger and predominantly female. An interesting empirical finding established that there was no statistically significant impact of the awareness on the practical application of healthy nutrition principles to the life of young adults. The higher awareness was expressed in stronger correlations with the intentions of young adults to change their own weight, effectuate fasting periods and adjust their dietary habits. The students who claimed to have applied the principles of healthy nutrition in practice had a lower statistically significant body mass index (BMI) (normal and pre-obesity), much more rarely followed dietary regimes and were found in a statistically significant measure to aim at correcting their weight by up to 5 kg. They more often consulted competent peers or specialist coaches or nutritionists on dietary issues, consumed more fruit and vegetables, and less pastry and sugar foods. Contrary to all expectations, however, those who followed healthy nutritional regimes, according to their own subjective assessment, had a weaker interest in the ingredients listed on food labels, compared to those who partially complied with healthy nutritional principles, consulted mainly the internet or aimed to reduce their weight by 10 to 15 kg.

The awareness for healthy nutrition strategies is not a sufficient factor when actually applying them to the life of young adults, regardless of the fact that they are following a healthcare course. Awareness campaigns for healthy nutrition will be more effective, if they are performed not only by specialists, but also by young adults who regularly practice healthy nutrition and have achieved notable results.

Key words: *Healthy nutrition, Dietary habits, University students.*