

CONSEQUENCES OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE EATING HABITS OF SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN IN SLOVAKIA

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic and strict rules to prevent the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus have caused significant changes in the lifestyle habits of the population. The aim of the research was to evaluate changes in the eating habits and selected aspects, including changes in body weight within the group of school-aged children in Slovakia caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The average age of the randomized group of children ($n = 252$) represented 8.6 ± 2.2 years. For the characteristic of 6 - 14 years old children the questionnaire method was used. The group consisted mainly of children aged 6 - 10 years (84.5%). Body weight and body height were calculated to the body mass index. The comparative assessment was focused on the pre-pandemic period vs. during a pandemic (in the 1st and 2nd wave of the pandemic). For statistical evaluation software Statistica 10.0 (StatSoft Inc., USA) was used.

Body weight increased during the pandemic in 44.44% representatives of the research sample that can be evaluated as an unfavorable trait. The recommended 5 - 6 meals daily had significantly ($p < 0.05$) more children during the pandemic (54.37% vs. 43.65%). Snacks (evening/night meals) were consumed with the higher frequency of 1.3 ± 0.7 ($p < 0.001$). During the pandemic, children consumed significantly more bread and pastries, milk, fresh vegetables ($p < 0.05$), pasta and cereals, meat products, yoghurts, eggs, fresh fruit, but also sweets, fast food, salty delicacies ($p < 0.001$). In the pandemic period, the number of portions fish consumed increased to 1.32 ± 1.08 ($p < 0.001$), eggs to 3.48 ± 2.30 ($p < 0.001$), honey to 3.37 ± 3.67 ($p < 0.01$) per week. During the pandemic, the children took several nutritional supplements of the following types: vitamin C ($p < 0.05$), vitamin D ($p < 0.001$), zinc and ginger ($p < 0.05$).

We have confirmed several negative changes in the consequences of the pandemic in school-aged children, which have pointed to the strategically necessary need for educational activity in terms of disease prevention in the post-covid period.

Key words: School-aged children, COVID-19 pandemic, Slovakia, Nutrition, Body weight.