

# ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS RELATED TO A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE (III). FOOD BEHAVIOURS AND CUSTOMS

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**Abstract:** *Lifestyle is a determining factor for the population health status. The present study followed the behavioural and attitude characteristics regarding alcohol consumption on a representative sample of the adult population of Romania.*

**Keywords:** *nutrition, Romania*

**Rezumat:** *Stilul de viață este un factor determinant al stării de sănătate a unei populații. Studiul de față a urmărit caracterizarea comportamentelor și atitudinilor legate de alimentație pe un eșantion reprezentativ din populația adultă a României.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *alimentație, România*

## WORKING HYPOTHESIS

The main purpose of promoting a healthy lifestyle at individual level and familial micro group level up to that of the society is to change the behaviours and attitudes in order to be favourable for health.

Through investments and activities, health promotion acts on the health state determinants in order to produce substantial benefits for the people's health, to provide the human rights observance, as well as to create a social and demographic capital.

Changing the behaviours and attitudes is a long-term process, which involves an educative, valuable process. The behaviours customs (food, hygiene, sexual life) should be followed taking into account their dynamics; sometimes, years are needed in order to be able to draw valid conclusions regarding their accomplishment, strengthening or consolidation. Health education efficiency is materialized slowly, having a more remote impact. The investments made in this field are extraordinary profitable, being incomparably more reduced and useful at the same time, than the expenses made for therapeutic purposes (2).

## THE PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of the research is to analyse the main characteristics of food behaviours and attitudes in Romania.

## MATERIAL AND WORKING METHOD

The universe of study comprised the adult population of Romania, aged between 20 and 64 years old. A probabilistic, bi-stadial, stratified sample of 3000 subjects was used. The total error was of  $\pm 1,8\%$ , and the probability was of 95%. The sample was validated based on the Statistics National Institute databases and on the population census from 2002. The method for gathering the data was the inquiry through the assisted, structured questionnaire. The study period was December 2005.

### Customs related to meals repartition during a day:

- 66% of the population use to take breakfast daily;
- 78% lunch,
- 85% dinner,
- 56% refreshments.

### Food characteristics:

- 30% 3 main meals, no refreshments;
- 5% breakfast, dinner and refreshments during the day,
- 10% lunch, dinner and refreshments,
- 10% lunch and dinner,
- 4% dinner and refreshments,
- 3% irregular food behaviour.

### Types of public food units frequented during a month:

- 17% of the population use to eat at fast-food at least once a month,
- 16% at pizza's houses,
- 9% at restaurant,
- 5% canteens/self-service units.

The majority of the respondents go out for dinner 4 times a month at the most. Only almost 2% use to eat in different types of public food units, more than 4 times a month.

### **The custom of eating cooked food:**

- The large part of the population (approximately 70%) serve at least once a day cooked/warm food, irrespective of the eating place,

- 48% eat warm meals 6-7 times a week,
- 12% eat warm meals less than 5 times a week.

### **Home cooked meals:**

- 87% of the population eat home cooked meals,
- 12% several times a week,
- 1% very rarely/never.

### **Food preparation modalities:**

- The majority of the population (79%) use oil for cooking,
- On the second place, (36%) is the fat,
- approximately 1% prefer margarine and/or the butter,
- those who do not use fat at all are less than 1%.

### **Sandwiches making:**

- the most frequently used fat on bread is the margarine (63%),
- 15% declare they often use the butter,
- 4% use the fat,
- 18% do not use fat on the butter at all.

**Milk consumption** can be found in 82% of the population. Out of the milk consumers:

- 68% prefer integral milk,
- 10% low-fat milk,
- 4% degreased milk.

### **Coffee consumption:**

- 30% of the population do not drink coffee;
- 32% drink one cup of coffee daily,
- 22% two cups of coffee/day,
- 16% more than two cups of coffee/day.

### **Tea consumption:**

- 53% of the population do not drink tea,
- 30% drink a cup of tea/day,
- 10% two cups of tea/day,
- 7% more than two cups of tea/day.

### **Preference for sugar substitutes:**

- The majority of the consumers (54%) use one cube of sugar/ one spoon in the coffee or tea,
- 33% of the consumers use two or more cubes of sugar,
- 11% do not use any natural or artificial sweeteners,

- 8% of the consumers do not use artificial sweeteners such as saccharine or aspartame,

- 16% prefer honey.

### **Bread consumption characteristics.**

#### **Preferred type of bread:**

- 86% of the population prefer the white bread,
- 12% intermediary bread,
- 6% other type of bread.

#### **Daily consumed bread quantity:**

- 1-4 slices to 19% of the population,
- 5-8 slices to 28% of the population,
- 9-12 slices to 20% of the population,
- More than 12 slices to 19% of the population.

#### **Consumption weight by food categories for the last seven days:**

- boiled potatoes and/or fried potatoes (cca 75%),
- rice and/or flour pastes (75%),
- milk products (83%),
- chicken (83%),
- fish (52%),
- pork / beef(61%),
- salami, sausages, ham (71%),
- eggs (79%)
- fresh vegetables (66%), canned vegetables (61%),
- fresh fruits (82%), canned fruits – compotes (48%), sweet patisserie products - cakes, cookies, sponge cake (59%), sweets- candies chocolate (56%),
- nonalcoholic drinks (75%)

#### **Daily consumption weight by food categories for the last seven days:**

- boiled potatoes and/or fried potatoes (almost 6%),
- rice and/or flour pastes (3%),
- milk products (12%),
- chicken (9%),
- fish (2%),
- pork / beef (4%),
- salami, sausages, ham (10%),
- fresh vegetables (9%), canned vegetables (7%),
- fresh fruits (19%), canned fruits – compotes (3%),
- sweet patisserie products - cakes, cookies, sponge cake (5%),
- sweets (candies chocolate) (6%),
- nonalcoholic drinks (15%),

- eggs (7%).

### **Salt consumption:**

- 22% of the population does not take salt in food during their meals,
- 63% add salt occasionally,
- 14% add salt almost always, even before tasting the food.

**Diet recommendations were made for 16% of the total population of Romania. The recommendations were made by:**

- Medical staff (5%),
- A family member (7%),
- Other persons (4%).

### **Gender differences regarding food customs:**

Food customs are not influenced by gender almost at all. There are few differences that occur in tea or coffee consumption or related to the artificial sweeteners and honey, which are larger in women. Also, a large part of women were advised to change their diet.

**Age differences in food customs.** As people grew older, they tend to take breakfast and lunch daily and to go out for dinner less. Fats consumption tend to decrease, the coffee consumption has its maximum between 30 and 49 years old, while tea is preferred by those above 50 years old. A large part of the elderly was advised to change their diet.

**Differences related to income and education level in food customs.** The share of those who have tried to change the food quality is proportional with the increase of the education level and incomes.

**Differences due to the body mass index (BMI) regarding the food customs.** Surprisingly, food customs do not differ very much according to the BMI, even if the percentage of those who were advised to change their diet increases from 18% in the case of those with a normal weight to 54% in the cases of the obese type II persons. The differences according to the type of the consumed food are quite reduced (the obese persons consume fish or fresh vegetable more rarely), but the ingested food quantity is different (this information has not been measured).

### **Food customs differences due to tobacco consumption.**

There is no defined relation between smoking and food customs, except one: coffee consumption is larger in the case of smokers (the results of this parameter were presented in a study published in a previous edition).

### **Food customs differences due to alcohol consumption.**

There are no significant differences in food customs taking into account the alcohol consumption.

2. Druginfo Romania, <http://www.druginfo.ro/drugori.cfm>.
3. Ministerul Sănătății, Centrul de Sănătate Publică Sibiu - Atitudini și Comportamente Legate de Stilul de Viață Sănătos, Raport Final, decembrie 2005. (Ministry of Public Health, Public Health Centre of Sibiu – Attitudes and Behaviours Related to a Healthy Lifestyle. Final Report).

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