

Stages of change towards healthy eating and factors perceived as influent in food consumption by Portuguese adults

Rui Póinhos¹, Bela Franchini^{1,2}, Cláudia Afonso^{1,2}, Flora Correia^{1,2}, Maria Daniel Vaz de Almeida^{1,2}, The SPCNA Directorate.

¹ SPCNA – Portuguese Society of Nutrition and Food Sciences; ² Faculty of Nutrition and Food Sciences, University of Porto, Portugal.

Introduction and Aim

Healthy eating is one of the main lifestyles' variables with influence on the incidence and prevalence of non-transmissible chronic diseases. The knowledge about the factors perceived to have major influence in food consumption and their relation with the stages of change towards healthy eating is of great importance to increase the success of public health interventions, namely those designed to promote healthy eating.

The **aim** of this work was to evaluate the association between the factors perceived to have major influence in food consumption and the stages of change towards healthy eating in the Portuguese adult population.

Participants and Methods

Data from the study "Portuguese Population's Food Habits and Lifestyles" were used. A national representative sample of 3529 subjects was interviewed at home between February and April 2009. The present analysis is carried out in 3481 subjects due to incompleteness of 48 records.

Subjects were asked to select from a list of fourteen, the three factors which had the greater importance in food consumption (Lennernäs et al. 1997). The stages of change towards healthy eating were assessed by a question adapted from Kearney et al. (1999). The distribution of subjects by stages of change towards healthy eating according to the selection of each factor was compared using chi-square tests.

Results

Table 1 shows the proportion of subjects which selected each of the factors as major influences in their food consumption.

The distribution of subjects by stages of change was significantly associated with the selection of ten of the fourteen evaluated factors (Table 2). The selection of "easiness or convenience of preparation" and "content of additives, colorings and preservatives" was associated with the highest proportions of subjects in the stage of relapse.

The greater differences on the proportions of subjects in the stage of maintenance were found for subjects who selected "diet recommended by the physician" (63 vs. 45% among those who didn't select this factor), "trying to eat healthy" (58 vs. 41%), "easiness or convenience of preparation" (35 vs. 50%), "food availability" (38 vs. 50%), "quality or freshness of foods" (56 vs. 44%), and "vegetarian eating or other special practices" (56 vs. 46%).

Table 1. Factors perceived as influent in food consumption.

1 Taste	53,3%	8 Easiness or convenience of preparation	20,1%
2 Price	32,9%	9 Controlling weight	18,2%
3 Trying to eat healthy	32,6%	10 Diet recommended by the physician	8,3%
4 Habit or routine	29,6%	11 Presentation or packaging	6,8%
5 Food availability	25,6%	12 Vegetarian eating or other special practices	3,4%
6 Quality or freshness of foods	24,0%	13 My cultural, religious or ethnic roots	3,4%
7 Other person decides most of the foods I eat	21,2%	14 Content of additives, colorings and preservatives	3,3%

Table 2. Stages of change towards healthy eating and factors perceived as influent in food consumption.

	TOTAL	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Pre-contemplation	11,5%	10,4%	13,4%	3,2%	12,2%	15,7%	6,0%	14,9%	13,5%	7,6%	3,8%	15,2%	6,1%	12,9%	9,4%
Contemplation	8,3%	8,8%	8,1%	4,9%	9,0%	10,1%	4,9%	8,1%	10,5%	8,6%	4,8%	12,3%	19,3%	6,5%	13,3%
Decision	15,9%	17,0%	17,9%	14,2%	15,4%	19,0%	14,2%	13,7%	19,5%	18,2%	10,3%	17,6%	8,8%	21,0%	11,7%
Action	9,1%	9,1%	9,1%	10,3%	7,2%	8,6%	10,2%	9,0%	8,0%	14,9%	12,8%	7,0%	6,1%	4,0%	6,3%
Maintenance	46,6%	46,2%	43,0%	57,7%	48,5%	38,1%	55,8%	47,7%	35,1%	43,2%	62,8%	38,9%	56,1%	49,2%	46,9%
Relapse	8,6%	8,6%	8,5%	9,6%	7,8%	8,5%	8,8%	6,6%	13,4%	7,6%	5,5%	9,0%	3,5%	6,5%	12,5%
p		0.137	0.015	< 0.001	0.089	< 0.001	< 0.001	0.006	< 0.001	< 0.001	< 0.001	0.019	< 0.001	0.196	0.086

Discussion

The knowledge on factors perceived by consumers to have major influence in their food consumption is of the utmost importance when planning any public health intervention. This work contributes with the association between these factors and the stages of change towards healthy eating.

The fact that the selection of most of the factors was significantly associated with the distribution by stages of change and the differences between them may assist the use of motivational strategies in interventions to promote healthy eating.

References

Kearney JM, de Graaf C, Damkjaer S, Engstrom LM. Stages of change towards physical activity in a nationally-representative sample in the European Union. *Public Health Nutr* 1999; 2(1a): 115-24.

Lennernäs M, Fjellström C, Becker W, Giachetti I, Schmitt A, Remaut de Winter A, Kearney M. Influences on food choice perceived to be important by nationally-representative samples of adults in the European Union. *Eur J Clin Nutr* 1997; 51(Suppl 2): S8-15.