



Obesity, eating habits and nutritional knowledge among school children

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The prevalence of childhood obesity is rising rapidly, resulting in increased prevalence of associated co-morbidities. Childhood overweight is becoming increasingly prevalent all over the world and this trend is seen as an alarming development by public health professionals. The most frequently stated reason for their concern is that overweight children tend to become overweight adults and that adult overweight is a strong risk factor for a number of chronic diseases. Literature reviews show that most studies on the consequences of childhood overweight have indeed focused on early symptoms or risk factors for later chronic diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease. For overweight children and their parents, current overweight-related health problems, might be more reason for concern than the risk of adverse health effects in future.

In Iran, like many of other developing countries, prevalence of overweight and obesity in children has been increasing but in children and adolescents, only a few longitudinal follow-up studies have been performed. Investigated trends in the shape of the BMI growth curve throughout children and therefore provide little evidence of how trends in BMI develop over age and over time. Such information is useful not only to identify appropriate ages and patterns of BMI growth for targeted intervention but also to provide insight into the etiologic factors responsible. Then, if current trends continue, the higher prevalence of overweight and obesity may result in a decline in life expectancy.

Obesity has been considered to result from lifestyle changes, especially in food consumption, physical activity and sedentary tendencies, because the environment has grown more obesogenic in recent decades. Regarding food habits, there have been the following two opposing tendencies: 1) an increasing consumption of high-caloric industrialized foods and beverages and 2) a decreasing consumption of natural and healthy foods, such as fruits, vegetables, legumes and whole grains, which is a habit considered to be a risk factor for obesity.

Poorer eating habits as well as less physical activity were associated with the risk of obesity. An obesogenic environment could change if teachers and parents worked together to form healthy food intake and physical activity habits.

Despite fewer calories ingested by obese children versus normal-weight children, their nutritional status can be explained by bad habits, such as skipping breakfast, not bringing lunch to school and bringing money to buy food at school. Additionally, differences in nutritional status could be explained by the type of food and drink consumed because the results indicate that obese children consume more fatty foods and sugary drinks



than other children. In addition, obese children performed fewer physical activities at school, slept fewer hours and had more sedentary routines.

Totally, results of one study showed that in West Azerbaijan, the incidence of overweight among girls and boys in schools was increased from 110.21 and 101.45 to 148.09 and 112.05, respectively. Current study showed that the incidence of obesity among boys was increased at 15 years of age comparing 12 years of age but this trend in girls was decreased slightly.

In summary, results showed that the overweight and obesity was increased among school children at 12 years of age comparing 15 years of age in West Azarbijan Province, Iran. Increasing of overweight and obesity due to unhealthy lifestyle behaviors including decreasing lack of physical activity, overconsumption of process and fast foods and long sedentary games computers among school-aged children. Parents and children should develop the habit of cooking and serving food at home with their preferred taste and ingredients.

Conclusion

Research on incidence trend of overweight and obesity by cohort studies in children is poorly reported in Iran. So that, future studies need to follow-up on the associations between overweight and obesity with health outcomes when children develop and reach adolescence and adulthood. Our findings also confirmed that a careful evaluation is needed to assess unhealthy dietary pattern and physical inactivity that are important factors impacting on the risk of overweight and obesity in children.