FOOD HABITS OF SCHOOL TEENS
HÁBITOS ALIMENTARES DE ADOLESCENTES ESCOLARES

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ABSTRACT
Objective: to know the food habits of adolescents. Method: this is a descriptive and cross-sectional study with 145 adolescents of both sexes, enrolled in two public schools in the city of Picos, Piauí, Brazil, aged between 12 and 18 years. Data collection was carried out within the period from August to December 2010. To survey the food habits, a form with questions on food preference and frequency of consumption was used, which consisted of 32 items. Data analysis was performed through the software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 17.0. Mean value and standard deviation were calculated. Z test was used for independent data ratios. The values with p < 0.05 were considered statistically significant. The research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Universidade Federal do Piauí, under the CAAE 0078.0.045.000-10. Results: in the usual diet, adolescents had as the most consumed food groups: cereals and derivatives, eggs, embutidos, milk and dairy products, oils and fats, and soft drinks. To a lesser extent, candies, vegetables and legumes were consumed. Regarding gender, the most consumed food by girls was pasta (p = 0.017) and the most consumed foods by boys were couscous (p = 0.027) and candy (p = 0.071). Conclusion: there was a low frequency of healthy food habits among the adolescents under study. Thus, there’s a need for developing strategies to strengthen the field of food and nutritional surveillance for these adolescents, encouraging healthy food habits, as well as sustainable educational activities. Descriptors: adolescents; food habits; food consumption.

RESUMO
Objetivo: conhecer os hábitos alimentares de adolescentes. Método: trata-se de estudo descritivo e transversal com 145 adolescentes de ambos os sexos, matriculados em duas escolas públicas da cidade de Picos-Pi, com idades entre 12 e 18 anos. A coleta de dados ocorreu no período de agosto a dezembro de 2010. Para o levantamento do hábito alimentar foi utilizado um formulário com questões sobre preferência e frequência alimentar, composto por 32 itens. A análise dos dados deu-se por meio do programa Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), versão 17.0. Calcularam-se a média e o desvio padrão. Utilizou-se o teste z para proporções de dados independentes. Foram considerados estatisticamente significativos os valores com p < 0,05. A pesquisa foi aprovada pelo Comitê de Ética em Pesquisa da Universidade Federal do Piauí, sob o CAAE n. 0078.0.045.000-10. Resultados: na dieta habitual, os adolescentes tiveram como grupos de alimentos mais consumidos: cereais e derivados, ovos, embutidos, leite e derivados, óleos e gorduras e refrigerantes. Em menor proporção foram consumidos doces, hortaliças e legumes. Em relação ao gênero, o alimento mais consumido pelas meninas foi macarrão (p = 0,017) e os alimentos mais consumidos pelos meninos foram couscous (p = 0,027) e doce (p = 0,071). Conclusão: verificou-se baixa frequência de hábitos alimentares saudáveis nos adolescentes investigados. Assim, faz-se necessária a elaboração de estratégias que reforcem a área da vigilância alimentar e nutricional para esses adolescentes, estimulando hábitos alimentares saudáveis, bem como ações educativas sustentáveis. Descriptors: adolescentes; hábitos alimentares; consumo de alimentos.

RESUMEN
Objetivo: conocer los hábitos alimenticios de adolescentes. Método: esto un estudio descriptivo y transversal con 145 adolescentes de ambos sexos, matriculados en dos escuelas públicas de la ciudad de Picos, Piauí, Brasil, con edades entre 12 y 18 años. La recogida de datos ocurrió en el periodo de agosto hasta diciembre de 2010. Para la encuesta del hábito alimenticio se utilizó un formulario con cuestiones acerca de preferencia y frecuencia alimenticia, compuesto por 32 items. El análisis de datos se llevó a cabo por medio del programa Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) versión 17.0. Fue calculada la media y la desviación estándar. Fue utilizada la prueba z para proporciones de datos independientes. Fueron considerados estadísticamente significativos los valores con p < 0,05. La investigación fue aprobada por el Comité de Ética en Investigación de la Universidad Federal do Piauí, bajo el CAAE 0078.0.045.000-10. Resultados: en la dieta habitual, los adolescentes tuvieron como grupos de alimentos más consumidos: cereales e derivados, huevos, embutidos, leche y derivados, aceites y gomeras y refrescos. En menor proporción fueron consumidos dulces, verduras y legumbres. En cuanto al género, el alimento más consumido por las niñas fue macarrón (p = 0,017) y los alimentos más consumidos por los niños fueron couscous (p = 0,027) y dulce (p = 0,071). Conclusión: se verificó una baja frecuencia de hábitos alimenticios saludables en los adolescentes investigados. Así, es necesario desarrollar estrategias para reforzar el área de la vigilancia alimentaria y nutricional para estos adolescentes, estimulando hábitos alimenticios saludables, así como acciones educativas sostenibles. Descriptors: adolescentes; hábitos alimenticios; consumo de alimentos.

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INTRODUCTION

Food habits have a great influence on the health, growth, and development of individuals. The increased number of Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases (CNCDs) today has become a matter of concern for the maintenance of health and life expectancy, thus demonstrating the need for prevention.

It’s known that feeding comprises not only the act of satisfying a vital need, but also to nurture and bring health benefits. It’s responsible for human growth and development, as well as the guarantee of a healthy quality of life. Besides providing nutrients, food involves many factors: cultural, social, affective, and sensory ones. The conception of a healthy feeding becomes needed to improve the population’s health.

With the changes in nutritional patterns of the population, the epidemiological profile also changes. One observes, today, that malnutrition rates have fallen, and the overweight and obesity levels increased alarmingly. According to data from the Ministry of Health, in a survey carried out by the Surveillance of Risk Factors and Protection for Chronic Diseases through Telephone Interviews (Vigitel), in Brazil, the overweight rate was 46.6% and the obesity rate was 13.9%.

Changes in the Brazilian feeding model which result from current technological advances have brought negative influences on health. There was an increased consumption of industrialized products, fatty and sugary ones, and a decreased consumption of integral foods, something which was mostly observed among young people. Excessive energy, sugar, and fat in the food of Brazilians, as well as the deficient consumption of complex carbohydrates and fibers, are presented as reasons for unbalanced body weight.

Today, CNCDs are the focus of world attention, presenting themselves as an impediment to quality of life. Many of them pose limitations and prohibitions to patients with regard to food intake and cause obesity, diabetes, hypertension, cerebrovascular accidents, osteoporosis, cancer, and coronary heart diseases.

During adolescence, food habits and lifestyle are established, since it’s the time when one seeks a complete freedom of choice. That is, parents no longer have control over the decisions of their children. It’s during this phase that many adolescents acquire bad food habits and choose a lifestyle. It’s the time when one wants to have new experiences and, due to a misconception of how to live them, many adolescents abuse of alcohol and cigarettes, in a search for unknown pleasures, something which causes a great damage to health. The habits acquired in adolescence tend to persist throughout life.

In a study on obesity and overweight, high rates were observed in adolescents. The authors consider that identifying food habits and risk factors for health in childhood and adolescence is of paramount importance, allowing the creation of policies, programs, and interventions which help in the control of adult life chronic diseases.

Identifying these risk factors among adolescents is needed for education and the prevention of diseases. This audience is highlighted by the factor “comfort” that modern life offers. Another aspect observed is the constant influence of media on them, when it supports a mistaken view of what a healthy feeding or lifestyle is. Feeding and lifestyle are key to the prevention and/or reduction of disorders experienced by people with any type of CNCD. Nowadays, feeding behavior plays an essential role in the prevention of diseases.

Recently, data from Vigitel show that 42.8% of the population of Teresina, Piaui, Brazil, are overweight. Knowing the profile of adolescents from the city of Picos is needed, taking into account that overweight is a significant issue in a very close reality, that young people make up a large portion of the population, and that food habits are established during adolescence.

OBJECTIVE

- To know the food habits of adolescents.

METHOD

Descriptive and cross-sectional study, carried out in the town of Picos, with 145 adolescents from 12 to 18 years, enrolled in two public schools, within the period from August 2010 to July 2011.

Data collection took place from August to December 2010, at the school itself, using a pre-tested form to survey personal data. To identify food habits, a form with questions on food preference and frequency was used, consisting of 32 items.

Data analysis was performed through the software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 17.0. Mean value and standard deviation were calculated. Z test was used for independent data ratios. Values with p < 0.05 were considered statistically significant.
The study was carried out after the approval of the research project by the Research Ethics Committee of Universidade Federal do Piauí (UFPI), under the CAAE 0078.0.045.000-10. We complied with the requirements from the Guidelines and Standards of Research Involving Human Beings, presented in Resolution 196/96, from the Brazilian National Health Council (CNS), regarding the ethical issues of research involving human beings.

RESULTS

We evaluated 145 adolescents, of both sexes, being 62.7% female. The participants were aged between 12 and 18 years, with an average age of 14.8 years.

Regarding the family income of adolescents, the results showed that in most cases adolescents are living in families which receive up to two minimum wages (84.1%). Concerning the classification of students by teaching modality, about 75.2% of students were attending Elementary School.

The usual diet of adolescents had as the most consumed food groups: cereals and derivatives, eggs, embutidos, milk and dairy products, oils and fats, and soft drinks. In a lesser extent, candies, vegetables, and legumes were consumed.

Regarding gender, the most consumed food by the girls was pasta (p = 0.017) and among the boys couscous (p = 0.027) and candy (p = 0.071) were the most consumed foods.

DISCUSSION

Effects of globalization and life habits may be associated to a fat intake higher than the ideal one with regard to quality of life. This alternative would be related to advertising campaigns which influence food choice, favoring the use of manufactured products in a large scale and low cost, usually with high concentration of simple sugars and fats. 10

Thus, adolescents tend to follow the change in the Brazilian health and nutrition scene of the population which has occurred over the past three decades, characterized by an increased consumption of proteins and fats (especially saturated ones), excess sugar and deficient consumption of fruits and vegetables, in a population level. 11

In this group, there was an association of pasta, couscous, and candy consumption to gender. In a study carried out in Ilhabela, Sao Paulo, Brazil, with adolescents, there was excessive consumption of the sugar and candies group, and a deficient consumption of the rice, milk, fruits, vegetables, and legumes groups. 12

In this study, there was a low consumption of vegetables and legumes. Other studies also demonstrate the low consumption of fruits and legumes among adolescents. 13-15

Researches show Brazilian adolescents present an excessive consumption of fats. 16-18 It was also observed that even not having a very high consumption of fats, the population presents a disproportionate consumption of saturated fat and cholesterol, which is more inappropriate in younger cohorts.
Surveys developed in recent decades, in Brazil, highlight the excessive consumption of sugar, which makes up about 1/4 of total carbohydrates in the diet of Brazilians, presenting a slight rise in the proportion of energy from sugar and soft drinks.\textsuperscript{16} Data from a multicenter study showed that soft drinks were consumed in all income strata, and that participation in the total energy value of the diet decreased as family income increased.\textsuperscript{19}

Aggressive marketing techniques toward the consumption of unhealthy foods have been constantly used.\textsuperscript{20} Analyzing the quantity and quality of products advertising aired on Brazilian television, the result of a research showed that food products were the most frequently advertised, regardless of hour, station, and day. Regarding the quality of food advertised, it was found that television promotes, predominantly, products with high levels of fats and/or sugar and salt.\textsuperscript{19}

According to the Global Strategy on Healthy Eating\textsuperscript{21}, governments must play a key role in creating, in cooperation with other stakeholders, a segment which fosters and drives changes in people’s, families’, and communities’ behavior, so that they adopt positive decisions concerning health. Thus, the role of improving adolescents’ feeding should not be regarded as a purely individual effort, because it also depends on government efforts to implement public policies to promote health.

Partnering with industry to produce healthier foods may be a path to be urgently pursued, because modifying eating habits, especially among young people, hasn’t been an easy task. Alongside this effort, the school should be an educational environment and, in this sense, the foods offered or sold at schools must consist of models to be followed by children and adolescents.\textsuperscript{22,23}

**CONCLUSION**

We observed a low frequency of healthy food habits among the adolescents under study. Thus, there’s a need for developing strategies to strengthen the field of food and nutrition surveillance for these adolescents, encouraging healthy food habits, as well as sustainable educational activities.

**REFERENCES**


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