



The study is published online by the prestigious International Journal of Pediatric Obesity

The Mediterranean diet can help prevent cardiovascular risk in children

Barcelona, 28 April 2010 - For the first time, a study conducted by the Cardiovascular Risk and Nutrition Research Group at IMIM (Hospital del Mar Research Institute) and the Community Nutrition Research Group - Nutrition Research Foundation (FIN) at the Barcelona Science Park (PCB) shows that youth who eat a Mediterranean diet **have a smaller waist circumference than those who do not**. Waist circumference due to the accumulation of abdominal fat is a factor that is correlated with the **risk of cardiovascular disease**.

The study shows that accumulation of fat in the abdomen above certain limits is an indicator of an unfavourable metabolic profile, not only in adults but in children and youth as well. Adherence to a Mediterranean diet, which is rich in fibre, vegetables and fish, by the child and youth population results in a lower risk of becoming obese, thus protecting against diseases related to being overweight, such as diabetes and cardiovascular pathologies at premature ages. **By correcting the level of abdominal fat in children and youth through more physical exercise and a better diet, protection and prevention guidelines can be set for their future health.** This is an objective that is harder to achieve in the adult population. It must be taken into account that it is the distribution of fat in the abdominal area, more than the distribution of fat in the rest of the body, that directly correlates with cardiovascular pathologies.

Recent years have seen a rise in the number of children and youth who have a high level of abdominal fat accumulation. For this reason, the existence of this study is of great importance, **as it is currently the only representative study that has been conducted on children and youth in Spain.**

The research team has observed, in the subjects studied, the association that exists between adherence to the Mediterranean diet and the distribution of adipose tissue, measuring waist circumference in a **sample of 2,513 Spanish youth between the ages of 10 and 24**. Staff specially trained for the study carried out the body measurements. The degree of compliance with the Mediterranean diet was obtained by means of a questionnaire (KIDMED-16) specifically designed for children and youth. This questionnaire measured items such as the intake of fruits and vegetables, fish, fast food, the habit of skipping

breakfast, the consumption of sweets and pastries, as well as the intake of yoghurts and other dairy products. For example, paradoxically, skipping breakfast is associated with a higher risk of becoming overweight. Above all however, **this questionnaire made it possible to identify those children who are at risk, so that appropriate measures can be taken to prevent future pathologies.**

The study confirms, once again, how the Mediterranean diet can help improve health and justifies the nutrition education policies that can be implemented in different areas of action in order to protect the present and future health of our children and youth through diet.

Reference article:

Mediterranean diet and waist circumferences in a representative national sample of young Spaniards. Helmut Schröder^{1,2}, Michelle A. Mendez^{3,4}, Lourdes Ribas⁵, Maria-Isabel Covas^{1,2} & Lluís Serra-Majem⁵. *International Journal of Pediatric Obesity*, 2010; 00: 1–4

For more information, please contact:

IMIM Communication Service:

Rosa Manaut, Tel: 618509885 or Marta Calsina, Tel: 933160680 or 638720000

Communication and Institutional Relations Department of the Barcelona Science Park

Azucena Berea, Tel: 934034662 or Carmen Pérez, Tel: 934034568