

CANCER: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE NUTRITION-RELATED RISK-REDUCTION PRACTICES AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL CHILDREN (11-15 YEARS)

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Background: Cancer can be regarded as a disease of the body's cells and it is known to be one of the leading killers in our society today. Because some foods actually contribute to the development of cancer and other foods lessen the risk, it is thought that 35%-40% of human cancers are potentially preventable if people are aware of the implications of their dietary choices throughout their childhood.

Objective: This paper seeks to address an assessment of nutrition-related risk-reduction practices of cancer among secondary school children 11-15 years old. It is based on the study of an analysis of the dietary intake of fifty students. Their diets, including lunch from the school meals program, were monitored via student-kept journals.

Design: Their weight and height were taken at the beginning and the end of thirty days for the purpose of checking their Body Mass Index¹ (BMI) and also for identifying their weight status, namely *underweight*, *healthy*, *overweight* or *obese*. The food intakes of the students were analyzed using the *ESHA Food Processor version 7* in order to establish the intakes of key nutrients associated with risk for cancer development.

Results: It was discovered that ten percent (10 %) of the students were overweight-obese and that even though the time period for the research was short, there was child who went from normal to obese and one from overweight to obese. This indicates that it is very easy for an adolescent at this stage in the life cycle to increase body weight quickly and hence, this poses a definite risk for cancer development as obesity is a proven risk factor.

One hundred percent (100%) of the study population met and exceeded their Recommended Allowance for Dietary Fiber, however, the intake amounts were unusually high therefore, it is thought that there may have been some error in either data entry or within the Analysis program itself. If treated as correct though, by consuming an adequate amount the study population is thereby practicing some risk-reduction measures since dietary fiber is believed to be a strong risk reducer of cancer development. Sixty-eight percent (68%) and forty-two percent (42%) of the study population consumed excessive amounts of Total fat and Saturated fat respectively whilst 30% and 28% respectively, had an intake of vegetables and fruits below the Recommended Daily Allowances. This show that approximately 1/3 of the study population does not have an adequate intake of vegetables and fruit hence; indicating that they are therefore at risk for the development of nutrition-related cancers since adequate fruit and vegetable intakes play a major role in cancer risk-reduction practices. The results from this research indicate that the major risk for this study population comes from a high saturated fat intake and an insufficient intake of fruit and vegetables.

Conclusion: Recommendations were made for appropriate nutritional interventions towards the promotion of a healthier population by providing information for increasing nutrition based risk-reduction practices especially among adolescent school children.

