

ABSTRACT

DIETARY PATTERNS, NUTRITIONAL STATUS AND ACTIVITY LEVELS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

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Proper nutrition during adolescence is important for growth, long-term health promotion, and eating habits. Poor eating habits and physical inactivity are powerful determinants of some non-communicable chronic disease.

The objective was to determine the dietary habits, nutritional status and physical activity patterns of adolescents in 4th form in Trinidad. A cross-sectional design study was used and a random sample of 1512 subjects identified.

A qualitative food frequency questionnaire and a physical activity questionnaire were used to determine dietary and physical activity patterns. Weights, heights and triceps skin folds were measured. Adolescents were classified as being thin, normal, overweight or obese.

619 girls and 601 boys, ages 14-17 participated. 34% was of East Indian descent, 32% African, 32% of mixed ethnicity and 2% other.

The results indicated that 14% were thin, 74% had normal weight, 7% overweight and 5% obese. More adolescents of East Indian ethnicity were found to be thin. ($p < 0.001$).

Although fruits were consumed more regularly than vegetables, few adolescents consumed them daily. Rice and white bread/roti were the most commonly consumed staples. High fibre foods were not frequently eaten.

Chicken was the most commonly consumed food from animals. 14% ate chicken daily. Fast foods were eaten on a weekly basis. The most important were chicken and chips, hotdogs, doubles, cakes and chocolates. 51% consumed alcoholic beverages; 1% drank them daily.

12% did not participate in any physical activity, while 32% exercised less than three hours per week. Walking, weight training, running/jogging and cricket were the

most frequently reported activities. 78% did not participate in physical education at school.

There was no association between body size and exercise, nor were there any consistent associations between body size and diet.

This study indicated a problem of both thinness and obesity in this population. Eating-related concerns are numerous, and must be addressed. Inclusion of regular physical activity as a tool for enhancing overall health and social values are of paramount importance.

Keywords: Yvonne Ann Batson; Dietary patterns, nutritional status, activity levels, adolescent