LIFESTYLE HABITS OF MEDICAL STUDENTS', PHYSICANS OF TOMORROW, FROM THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION OF CROATIA

Gabrijela Divić, Ajka Relja, Tanja Mijačka, Ivana Kolcic
University of Split School of Medicine, Croatia, Split, Croatia

Introduction: Healthy lifestyle, namely healthy diet adherence, appropriate amount of daily physical activity, enough sleep and adequate stress management, ultimately reduce the risk of chronic non-communicable diseases, a major cause of morbidity and mortality worldwide. Our aim was to evaluate the lifestyle choices of medical students, physicians of tomorrow. They will be responsible for preventing and treating diseases in their patients, informing the general population about healthy lifestyle and, ideally, showing by example.

Methods: A cross-sectional study included 433 medical students of all six study years (118 males, 315 females) from the University of Split School of Medicine, yielding overall response rate of 84%. We used several instruments to assess the Mediterranean diet adherence, physical activity, stress and sleeping habits: the Mediterranean Diet Serving Score (1), International Physical Activity Questionnaire Short Form (2), and Perceived Stress Scale questionnaire (3). Additionally, average time of sleep duration during working days and off-work days was calculated.

Results: As little as 8% of students were adherent to the modern Mediterranean diet pyramid. High level of physical activity was present in 49% students, moderate level in 38% students and low level in 13% of medical students. Average sleep duration was 6.7 hours during working days (IQR=6.0-7.5), and 8.6 hours during free days (IQR=8.0-9.0). A quarter of students reported feeling very tired and sleepy after a night sleep in the working part of the week, compared to 3% of students who reported the same on the off-work days. Eight percent of students reported high stress, and 68% reported moderate stress perception.

Conclusion: Medical students from Split displayed surprisingly low adherence to the Mediterranean diet, moderately satisfactory sleep duration, while physical activity and stress levels were more compatible with healthier lifestyle. We need to put greater efforts in healthy lifestyle promotion among future physicians, especially regarding nutrition.

References:

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