

Attitude of the Adult Population of Lithuania Towards Added Sugar and Sweeteners in Food

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Abstract : Background. The World Health Organization recommends to reduce an intake of added sugar. High consumption of sugar and sweets increases the risk of obesity and overweight. The analysis of the body mass index (BMI) data of the adult population of Lithuania shows that only less than half (45.7%) of the total population has a normal body weight (18.5-24.9 BMI), overweight (25.0-29, 9 BMI) more than a third (36.6 percent), obese (≥ 30.0 BMI) is 15.4 percent population and underweight (< 18.5 BMI) has 2.1 percent population. More men than women are obese (16.5% and 14.9%, respectively). In order to achieve this, alternative sweetening methods by using sweeteners might be employed. However, studies show that attitudes and beliefs might act as a barrier for sugar replacement with sweeteners. In Lithuania, there is a lack of studies on consumption of sugar and sweeteners, including attitudes of Lithuanian residents towards them. Therefore the objective of this study was to assess the attitude of Lithuanian adults towards replacement of added sugar with sweeteners. Methods. A representative sample of Lithuanian population of adults aged 18 to 75 years was formed. A total number of 1008 residents participated. Data was collected using a questionnaire. With respect to social and demographic characteristics, distribution of respondents by answering to one question was analysed. Respondents were asked to indicate their likely behaviour in terms of added sugar if they knew that there a healthier than sugar sweetener exists. Results. Every fifth participant (20.7%) indicated no added sugar consumption and no likely use of the healthier sweetener. Every second respondent among added sugar consumers (40.0% of whole sample) indicated that if they knew about existence of a healthier sweetener than sugar, they would try it and, if liked it, would use it instead of sugar. Approximately 35.0% of whole sample would ignore the fact that healthier than sugar sweetener exists and continue to consume sugar regardless of its effects on health. Younger, urban and higher educated respondents were more likely to opt for a healthier sweetener instead of added sugar (respectively, 45.7% vs. 34.4%, 43.3% vs. 31.2%, 47.6% vs. 37.3% of whole sample, $p < 0.05$). Conclusions. Half of Lithuanian adult consumers of added sugar would try to replace added sugar with healthier sweetener. Such a reasonable attitude was more prevalent among younger, urban and higher educated respondents.

Keywords : added sugar, lithuanian adult population, sweeteners., food

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