We assessed weight management practices in 266 boys and 312 girls (mean age 15.6 ± 1.3 years) from two schools in Lisbon. Body image was assessed using the method of Stunkard and participants were classified as desiring to lose weight if the ideal image was thinner than the current. Other data collected included measured height and weight, current smoking status, participation in extracurricular sports, the number of meals consumed the day before and meal skipping. No difference in the prevalence of overweight/obesity were found between genders (22.1% in girls and 19.5% in boys, p > 0.05). Conversely, willingness to lose weight was significantly higher in girls (48% vs 23% in boys, p < 0.001) and similar findings were observed after stratifying for BMI categories. Girls willing to lose weight smoked and skipped meals more frequently, whereas no differences were found for extracurricular sport activities. Boys willing to lose weight skipped meals more frequently and reported lower extracurricular sport activities, whereas no differences were found for smoking. Participants wishing to lose weight also reported a lower number of meals the day before. The highest prevalence of willingness to lose weight among girls might be related to media pressure that perpetuates the ideal of thinness and a negative stigma associated with being overweight in girls. Our results are also in agreement with a previous study suggesting that adolescents desiring to lose weight engage in several unhealthy behaviours such as meal skipping and smoking. Actually, meal skipping does not lead to weight loss, and the increased smoking prevalence might be related to the widespread perception that smoking contributes to weight loss. Still, of particular concern was the fact that participants wishing to lose weight actually tended to practice less sports, one of the major determinants of weight loss. We conclude that weight reduction practices among Portuguese adolescents are inadequate and that educational measures are urgently needed in order to curb such unhealthy behaviours.

**References**


