Design of the nutritional therapy for overweight and obese Spanish adolescents conducted by registered dieticians; the EVASYON study
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Design of the nutritional therapy for overweight and obese Spanish adolescents conducted by registered dieticians; the EVASYON study

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Abstract

Background: Dietary treatment for obese adolescents should aim to ensure adequate growth and development, by reducing excessive fat mass accumulation, avoiding loss of lean body mass, improving well-being and self-esteem and preventing cyclical weight regain. The aim of this article is to describe the dietary intervention design and the methods used to evaluate nutritional knowledge and behavior in the EVASYON study (Development, implementation and evaluation of the efficacy of a therapeutic programme for overweight/obese adolescents).

Methods/design: EVASYON is a multi-centre study conducted in 5 Spanish hospital settings (Granada, Madrid, Pamplona, Santander and Zaragoza), where 204 overweight/obese Spanish adolescents were treated in groups of 9 to 11 subjects over 20 visits. The study was implemented in two stages: an intensive, calorie-restricted period for the first 9 weeks, and an extensive body-weight follow-up period for the last 11 months. A moderate energy intake restriction was applied in the intensive period according to the degree of obesity, on the basis of a balanced diet supplying 50-55% of daily energy as carbohydrates; 30-35% as fats and 10-15% as proteins. In the intensive period, adolescents were prescribed both a fixed full-day meal plan for the first three weeks and a full day meal plan with different food-choices for 6 weeks. Later, adolescents received a flexible meal plan based on food exchanges for the follow-up period until the end of the trial.

Data on food intake, dietary and meal-related habits and behavior were collected by means of dietary questionnaires. To analyse nutritional knowledge, adolescents were examined regarding nutrient concepts and food exchanges for the follow-up period until the end of the trial.

Resumen

Antecedentes: El tratamiento dietético para los adolescentes obesos debería asegurar el crecimiento y desarrollo adecuados al reducir la acumulación excesiva de masa grasa, evitar la pérdida de masa magra corporal, mejorar el bienestar y la autoestima y prevenir la ganancia cíclica de peso. El objetivo de este artículo es el de describir el diseño de la intervención dietética y los métodos empleados para evaluar el conocimiento y la conducta nutricionales del estudio EVASYON (Desarrollo, implantación y evaluación de la eficacia de un programa terapéutico para adolescentes con sobrepeso/obesidad).

Métodos/diseño: EVASYON es un estudio multicéntrico realizado en 5 hospitales españoles (Granada, Madrid, Pamplona, Santander y Zaragoza), en el que se trató a 204 adolescentes españoles con sobrepeso/obesidad en grupos de 9 a 11 individuos a lo largo de 20 visitas. El estudio se implantó en dos etapas: un período intensivo de restricción calórica durante las 9 primeras visitas y un período extensivo de seguimiento del peso corporal durante los últimos 11 meses. Se aplicó una restricción moderada de consumo de energía durante el período intensivo en función del grado de obesidad, sobre la base de una dieta equilibrada que aporta el 30-35% de la energía diaria en forma de carbohidratos; 30-35% como grasas y 10-15% como proteínas. En el período intensivo, se prescribió a los adolescentes un régimen de comidas fijo para todo el día durante las 3 primeras semanas y un plan de comidas para todo el día con diferentes opciones durante 6 semanas. Posteriormente, los adolescentes recibieron un régimen de comidas flexible sobre la base de los intercambios de alimentos durante el período de seguimiento hasta el final del ensayo.

Se recogieron los datos de consumo de alimentos, dietéticos y hábitos relacionados con las comidas mediante cuestionarios de dieta. Para analizar el conocimiento nutricional, se examinó a los adolescentes con respecto a conceptos...
items for a healthy diet with the appropriate tools. Participants were given nutritional information with complementary teaching material, which was available on the EVASYON website (www.estudioevasyon.com).

Discussion: The dietary intervention of the EVASYON programme with a moderate calorie restriction for a limited period of time could be a good strategy in treating overweight and obese adolescents and that will be tested further. Moreover, combining fixed plan with free-choice menus may help adolescents and their families to make right decisions for every day meals.

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Key words: Adolescence. Multidisciplinary intervention. Nutritional education. EVASYON.

Background

Adolescence is a period of the life cycle characterized by important changes in body size and composition as well as in lifestyle habits. The prevalence of overweight and obesity among adolescents is dramatically increasing all over the world. This alarming trend is seen as a burden by public health professionals and government agencies and there is now a clear need to develop well founded standardized interventions to treat overweight/obese adolescents, following evidence-based practice criteria.

The risk of obesity depends on the interaction of genetic predisposition and exposure to obesogenic (environmental) risk factors such as inappropriate eating habits and food choice, poor nutritional knowledge, sedentary behavior and low physical activity, all of which are becoming major social problems in many countries. These etiological factors are associated with clinically important co-morbidities (cardiovascular disease, hypertension, type 2 diabetes mellitus, eating disorders, cancer...) in adult life. It is unlikely that a single-sided intervention can be targeted against all these multi-causal agents. Indeed, lifestyle changes require a high degree of commitment and active participation from adolescents and their relatives. Therefore, parents are central agents for change in the promotion of healthy eating and activity habits and their involvement in the programme is essential for an intervention to be successful. A multi-disciplinary approach is necessary with the participation of dieticians, doctors, psychologists and physical activity experts among other professionals as a single team.

Interventions that combined behavioral therapy with dietary and physical activity changes are widely used, and appear to be the most successful strategies for improving long-term weight maintenance and health status. Ideally, dietary treatment for obese children and adolescents should aim to ensure adequate growth and development, by reducing excessive fat mass accumulation, avoiding loss of lean body mass, improving well-being and self-esteem and preventing cyclical weight regain.

Balanced food patterns constitute a model for healthy living, based on foods to eat rather than foods to avoid, and an understanding of suitable weight-control measures. Promoting weekly menus with food variety is also the best defense for avoiding nutritional deficiencies and excess, as well as meeting micronutrient requirements. Moreover, meal plans with food exchanges represent a useful tool to encourage adolescents to keep to balanced diets.

The timetable for different meals throughout the day and their calorie distribution are also important issues as ways to improve nutritional education and food behavior in this population. Adolescents tend to have high energy density meals and snacks, therefore an important goal is to reduce calorie content. This practice involves a wide range of fresh and seasonal food, with a high proportion of vegetables, grains, fresh fruit and pulses, principal sources of vitamins, minerals, carbohydrates and fiber, which could play an important role in weight control and in decreasing dietary energy-density.

The aims of the EVASYON study were: 1) to develop a treatment programme including education on nutrition and physical activity patterns, 2) to implement this programme during one year in overweight/obese Spanish adolescents and 3) to evaluate the efficacy and limitations of the programme. For dissemination and comparative purposes with previous and future studies, detailed information concerning the design, development and evaluation of the dietary intervention of the EVASYON study is provided here.

Methods/design

Experimental design

The EVASYON programme is an interventional study implemented in a cohort of overweight/obese ado-
lescents aged 13 to 16 years as described by Martínez-Gómez et al. The initial treatment programme was conducted in 5 Paediatric hospitals from different cities in Spain (Granada, Madrid, Pamplona, Santander and Zaragoza) in small groups of nine to eleven patients. During the programme period, adolescents made twenty visits over approximately one year, within two specific stages (fig. 1): an intensive intervention period including 9 weekly visits for two months, and the extensive body weight maintenance intervention period including 11 monthly visits. Information on inclusion criteria is given in the work of Martínez-Gómez et al. Written consent to participate was obtained from both parents and adolescents. The complete study protocol was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the Helsinki Declaration (revised in Hong-Kong in 1989, in Edinburgh in 2000 and in Korea in 2008), following the European Community’s guidelines for Good Clinical Practice (document EEC 111/3976/88 of July 1990) and current Spanish law regulating clinical research in humans (RD 561/1993 regarding clinical trials). The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of each hospital participating in this project and by the Ethics Committee of the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC). Data obtained during the intervention was confidential and restricted to the participating investigators. Health authorities had full access rights to the database for inspection purposes.

Nutritional therapy and an educational programme on diet and food knowledge, psychological and eating...
Measurement of food intake

The EVASYON food and nutrition programme involved trained registered dietitians (RD), professionals who were directly responsible for the dietary and nutrition education programme. At baseline, participants were personally interviewed by an EVASYON Registered Dietician (RD) to evaluate their meal patterns, appetite, food choices and snacking, with specific dietary questionnaires. A detailed dietary history collected information about the family food-shop organization, usual location for meals during the week and week-ends, meal-related habits before starting the therapy or the personal beliefs about the role of food in the family, among others (Additional file 1). It was important for clinicians and RDs to inquire about specific disordered eating attitudes to assess whether they were likely to increase the risk of further eating disorders or weight gain.22,23

Moreover, a semi-quantitative food frequency questionnaire (FFQ), previously validated in Spain, was administered at the beginning, at six months and at the end of the programme. This tool was used to record usual food frequency consumption according to the standard portion size, energy and nutrient intake, and to detect possible nutritional risks and misbehaviors.24

Additionally, a visual analogue scale (VAS score) was used for the measurement of appetite and anxiety-related eating habits25 (Additional file 2). After personal interview at visit 1, adolescents and their families received a group session where the RD explained how to complete a 24 h-dietary recall. Pictures of food portion sizes and tables of equivalences

Additional file 1.—Dietary history model.

HABITS

How many meals do you have every day and at what time?
Do you watch TV when you eat?
Do they make you eat food that you don’t like?
How long do you take to eat your meals?
Do they make you eat food that you don’t like?
How frequently do you go to fast food restaurants?
How often do you eat out?
What do you eat out at the weekend?
What types of food do you usually eat?
Who does the shopping?
Who does the cooking?
If you eat at home, do you eat with your parents or with other adults?

Recent changes in weight:
- How many people live with you?
- Do you usually eat lunch at home or at school?
- If you eat at home, do you eat with your parents or with other adults?
- Who does the cooking?
- Who does the shopping?
- Do you have a microwave, oven or grill?
- Do you eat out at the weekend? And during the week?
- Do you go to fast food restaurants? How often?
- Do your eating habits change at the weekends? YES, NO, Which day?
- Do you have any special daily eating habits?
- What’s the first thing you have when you get up?
- Has anything special happened over the last 3 months that’s changed your eating habits?
- What do you usually drink during meals?
- Do you usually have second helpings?
- What do you usually eat between meals?
- How frequently do you buy sweets, confectionary or salty snacks?

Additional file 2.—Visual Analogue Scale (VAS score).
were used to illustrate the size of usual servings. This information helped the participants to fill in the 72 h dietary record. The data were transformed into grams or milliliters and were processed with an “ad hoc” computer programme, using validated food composition tables from Spain.26,27

In different patient assessments (visits 1, 9, 13 and 20) other dietary questionnaires were used to survey information on the adherence and challenges to the programme. A specific dietary record explored food habits that could be modified during the therapy (Additional file 3). Also, the survey for compliance with the diet contained two sections. The first part collected information on the food frequency intake of the main food groups, and favorite foods (but supposedly not healthy items) for adolescents such as sweet drinks, alcohol, cakes and fast food. The second part gathered information on meal-related habits and psychological aspects [Additional file 4]. A brand name FFQ and

Additional file 3.—Dietary record model.

**Part A:**
1. Do you usually eat slowly chewing your food properly? YES NO
   Do you watch TV when you’re eating? YES NO

2. Have you eaten out (in a restaurant, pizzeria or fast-food place) one day this week? YES NO

3. Have you had breakfast before leaving the house every day this week? YES NO

4. Have you had a mid-morning snack every day this week? YES NO
   Have you eaten fruit in your mid-morning snack? YES NO

5. Have you eaten lunch or dinner on your own one day this week? YES NO

6. Have you watched television when you were eating something? YES NO
   Can you remember what it was? YES NO

7. Have you bought something to eat when you were with friends? YES NO
   Can you remember what it was? YES NO

8. Do you usually have second helpings when you eat? YES NO
   What type of food do you usually have for a second helping? YES NO

9. How many times a week do you eat nuts and dried fruit? a) Never b) Once c) Twice d) Three times e) Four times f) More than four times

10. Do you eat at set times? YES NO
    How many times do you eat a day? a) Two b) Three c) Four d) Five e) Six f) More than six

11. Do you usually eat everything that is served on your plate? YES NO
    Does it sometimes seem to be a lot of food? YES NO

At which meal? a) Breakfast; b) Mid-morning break; c) Lunch; d) Mid-afternoon break; e) Dinner.

Additional file 4.—Survey for compliance with the diet.

The EVASYON study

Part B
1. Do you usually eat slowly taking time to chew your food properly? Do you watch TV when you eat? YES NO

2. Have you eaten out (in a restaurant, pizzeria or McDonalds) one day this week? YES NO

3. Have you had breakfast before leaving the house every day this week? YES NO

4. Have you had a mid-morning break every day of the week? Have you had fruit for your mid morning break? YES NO

5. Have you eaten lunch or dinner on your own any day this week? YES NO

6. Have you watched TV when you were eating? Can you remember what it was? YES NO

7. Have you bought something to eat when you were with friends? Can you remember what it was? YES NO

8. Do you usually have second helpings? What sort of food do you have second helpings of? YES NO

9. How many times have you eaten nuts and dried fruit this week? YES NO

10. Do you eat your meals at set times? How many times do you eat a day? a) Two b) Three c) Four d) Five

11. Do you usually eat everything that is served onto your plate? Does it sometimes seem too much? YES NO

Additional file 4.—Survey for compliance with the diet.

Assessing energy, nutritional requirements and calorie restriction

The International Obesity Task Force (IOTF) body mass index (BMI) cut-off values were used for the diagnosis of overweight and obesity in the adolescents.28 To determine basal metabolism rate (BMR), Schofield’s et al. (1985) equation was used,29 where the value of 1.3 was assumed as the activity factor to obtain
the total daily energy expenditure (TEE) for most subjects.

The BMI value was normalised to the standard deviation score. The restriction percentage was calculated as follows: If $Z = 2-3$, the TEE was reduced by 20%; if $Z = 3-4$, it was reduced by 30%; and if $Z > 4$, TEE was reduced by 40% and on this basis, a daily calorie restriction range was established. In no case were the diets lower than 1,300 kcal or higher than 2,200 kcal. Furthermore, energy restriction acted as a method to correct the excessive food portions consumed with reference to age, sex and physical activity level. At the end of each dietary period, it was necessary to adjust the equations according to the current body weight and the basal metabolism rate was measured to identify possible shifts in energy consumption/expenditure.30

**Dietary intervention strategy and exchange list guidelines**

The intensive treatment programme with a moderate calorie restriction was divided into two sub-phases: three weeks (visits 1 to 3) consisting of fixed full-day meal plan according to the criteria described above, and the next six weeks (visits 4 to 9) consisting of fixed full-day meal plan with food choices. During the extensive intervention period (visits 10 to 20), the adolescents were assigned to a flexible meal plan with food exchanges, maintaining a balanced diet according to sex and age. Daily energy distribution was based on the school period promoting breakfast and avoiding multiple snack consumption along the day. Therefore, dietary patterns maintained a typical distribution of 3 main meals (breakfast providing 20% of daily calories, lunch with 30-35%, and dinner with 20-25% of daily calories) and 2 snacks (mid-morning 5-10%, and afternoon 10-15% of daily calories).20,31

The diets were designed in accordance with the proportions of macronutrients recommended by the Food and Nutrition Board of the National Research Council: carbohydrates 50-55% of total daily energy intake (EI) (sugars < 10%); fats 30-35% of EI (10-20% monounsaturated, <10% saturated, 7-10% polyunsaturated); cholesterol < 300 mg/day, and proteins 10-15% of EI.32

The initial objective of the intervention was to join both adolescents and their families in the nutritional treatment; therefore, they received an energy-adjusted full-day menu for three weeks, to achieve the established calorie and nutrient objectives. The meal plan specified all daily meals, the type of foods to include with serving sizes (expressed in grams or individual portions), the garnishes, tips for healthy cooking, and daily bread and oil servings (table I).

The second meal plan used in EVASYON programme consisted of full-day menus with food choices structured similarly to the diets used before, but specifi-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example of one-day detailed meal plan (1,700 kcal) in the first three weeks of the intensive intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Day 1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Breakfast</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mid-morning snack</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Lunch</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Afternoon snack</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dinner</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Others</strong></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

fyng the main food group and the serving size, and with the possibility to choose from a list of specific foods. In this context, the meal plans became an easy tool for the family to acquire a degree of self-sufficiency selecting healthy foods and to develop healthy habits for making good decisions for the family’s well-being (table II).

The next step in the extensive body-weight maintenance programme was the full-day meal plan with exchanges. The exchange lists system used in the EVASYON study was based on the unification of nutrients (carbohydrates, proteins and lipids) and calories taking into account normal Spanish foods and serving sizes.33 The serving sizes of listed food items corresponded to an average of the amount of calories, carbohydrates, proteins and fats supplied, thus, any selection within a food group covered the same energy and macronutrient content.34 Based on the daily established energy requirements per person, the number of exchanges for each food group was quantified, following the dietary guidelines of food consumption in Spain.35 This method helped professionals generate uniformity in exchange conversions for recipes and food labels, in order to adapt family and personal food habits. On this basis, meals described the main food groups to be included, and each group was broken down into a list of foods with appropriately exchangeable food-portions (servings expressed in grams and home measures). This system gave flexibility and diversity to the diet and the family became responsible for programming the weekly menu by applying the acquired knowledge36 (table III).
Assessing nutritional knowledge

The understanding of the environmental influences, parents’ habits, health concerns and the association within nutritional knowledge and food choices, is relevant to develop effective youth obesity prevention strategies. At baseline, the EVASYON adolescents were requested to complete information about basic nutrition concepts, healthy eating and the relationship between several foods items and the corresponding food group to analyse their nutritional knowledge and food preferences (Additional file 5).

Nutritional assessment and educational materials

The intensive programme included weekly in-person visits with the RD to control the understanding and the fulfillment of the dietetic patterns and lifestyles, to answer possible doubts and to motivate the participants with the previously one-week established objectives. After this, group sessions took place, where the RD emphasized dietary knowledge, teaching of behaviour-change techniques and motivational, life and time management strategies, as well as the importance of the compliance with healthy habits and family support.

Educational materials were developed for EVASYON study to support the dietary treatment targets, such as the childhood food guide pyramid, pictures of portion-sizes, cooking techniques, basic concepts for planning healthy menus, etc., which were available on the EVASYON webpage. Similarly, all the incidences and changes related to lifestyle were recorded in a notebook of guidance to be reviewed by the RD in the next interview. A practical guide with recommendations for controlling body weight was handed out to families. During the extensive body-weight maintenance period, adolescents attended monthly in person follow-up visits with the RD. They and their families received group sessions on different aspects such as diet, physical activity, healthy habits and weight maintenance skills, how to engage in healthy weight control behaviors and relapse prevention. Objectives were planned to be accomplished on a one-month basis. Other studies have reported successful results following these strategies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day 1</th>
<th>Food groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breakfast</td>
<td>Milk, Cereal + 15 g Ham Fruit, Breakfast and mid-morning snack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-morning snack</td>
<td>Fruit Cereal, Afternoon snack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>200 g vegetable purée (with 80 g potato) 1 glass of semi-skimmed milk 1 low-fat yoghurt (natural, flavoured, with fruit…)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afternoon snack</td>
<td>Fruit Cereal + 30 g low-fat cheese, White fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinner</td>
<td>200 g varied salad 1 egg + 30 g tin natural tuna, Pulses and starches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others: Oil</td>
<td>Oil: 30 g/day (3 tbsp) Cold meat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table II
Example of one-day meal plan (1,700 kcal) with food choices during weeks 4 to 9 of intensive intervention
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Portion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dairy products</strong></td>
<td>Choose one among:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>240 g semi-skimmed milk</td>
<td>1 bowl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>250 g low-fat Yoghurt</td>
<td>2 units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cereals</strong></td>
<td>Choose one between:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45 g bread (normal/sliced)</td>
<td>1 big slice bread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>37 g Melba toast</td>
<td>4 small units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22 g Marie biscuits</td>
<td>3-4 units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30 g cereals/cereal bar</td>
<td>3 tbsp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fruit</strong></td>
<td>Choose one among:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>175 g orange, peach, strawberries</td>
<td>1 small unit/medium-sized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>150 g apricot, tangerine, pear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>125 g kiwi, apple, pineapple</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>75 g banana</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mid-morning snack</strong></td>
<td>Choose one among:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cereals</strong></td>
<td>45 g bread (normal/slice)</td>
<td>1 big slice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>37 g Melba toast</td>
<td>4 units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22 g Marie biscuits</td>
<td>3-4 units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30 g cereals/cereal bar</td>
<td>3 tbsp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Protein</strong></td>
<td>Choose one among:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15 g boiled or cured ham</td>
<td>1 slice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15 g semi-fat cheese or 30 g low-fat white cheese</td>
<td>1 small portion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cereals</strong></td>
<td>Choose one among:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30 g bread (normal/slice)</td>
<td>1 medium-sized slice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25 g Melba toast</td>
<td>3 units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15 g Marie biscuits</td>
<td>2-3 units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20 g cereals/cereal bar</td>
<td>2 tbsp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dairy products</strong></td>
<td>Choose one among:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>125 g low-fat yoghurt</td>
<td>1 unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>120 g semi-skimmed milk</td>
<td>1 small glass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Protein</strong></td>
<td>Choose one among:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15 g boiled or cured ham</td>
<td>1 slice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15 g semi-fat cheese or 30 g low-fat white cheese</td>
<td>1 small portion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table III**

Example of a meal plan (1,700 kcal) with food exchanges for the extensive intervention
The EVASYON study is a multidisciplinary and multicentre programme for overweight/obese adolescents that involved the management of dietary habits, physical activity and psychological profiles, in order to lower adiposity and prevent the development of chronic adult disease related to obesity such as diabetes, hypertension, and metabolic syndrome.

The EVASYON nutritional programme was monitored by RDs as practitioners qualified to implement and evaluate nutritional assistance programmes targeted at improving the nutritional status of the population.41 These professionals were previously trained.

**Table III (cont.)**  
Example of a meal plan (1,700 kcal) with food exchanges for the extensive intervention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Portion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>First course: choose one among</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetables</td>
<td>200 g raw or 240 g boiled (green beans, cauliflower, leeks, natural tomato, courgettes, lettuce, pepper, chard, thistle...) + 80 g raw or 90 g boiled potato</td>
<td>1 medium-sized plate (the potato reduces by 30 g the total amount of bread)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Cereals               | Choose one among:  
50 g uncooked or 175 g boiled pasta  
50 g uncooked or 140 g boiled rice  
200 g raw or 225 g boiled potato | 1 medium-sized plate |
| **Second course: choose one among:** |          |                          |
| Lunch                 | Choose one among:  
120 g raw or 105 g cooked white or oily fish.  
90 g raw or 70 g cooked lean meat (chicken, turkey, veal, rabbit, pork loin) | 1 unit + 1 ½ slices  
2 medium-sized slices |
| Dinner                | Choose one among:  
80 g raw or 70 g cooked white or oily fish  
60 g raw or 45 g cooked lean meat  
60 g egg + 30 g ham or 40 g tin natural tuna  
120 g low-fat fresh cheese or 60 g reduced-fat cheese (Cottage cheese, fromage frais, Quark, Spanish Burgos and Manchego, cheese triangles, Roquefort...)  
60 g boiled or cured ham  
30 g ham + 30 g reduced-fat cheese or 60 g fresh cheese + 30 g ham | 2 small portions  
3 fine slices |
| Pulses* (Choose 1 dish of vegetable for first dish) | 90 g uncooked or 225 g boiled: beans, chickpeas, lentils or 60 g uncooked legumes + 30 g ham  
300 g uncooked or 360 g boiled fresh peas or 200 g raw + 30 g ham | 1 big plate |
| Garnish* (when the first course is cereal) | 100 g raw or 120 g boiled vegetables | 1 small plate |
| **Others**            |          |                          |
| Bread (Distribute between lunch and dinner) | 60 g bread or 30 g (when vegetable + potato are eaten) | 2 medium-sized slices |
| Olive oil             | Total day: 30 g | 3 tbsp |
| **Dessert: choose one among:** |          |                          |
| Dairy products        | Choose one among:  
125 g low-fat yoghurt  
120 g semi-skimmed milk | 1 unit  
1 small glass |
| Fruit                 | Choose one among:  
175 g orange, peach, strawberries  
150 g apricot, tangerine, pear  
125 g kiwi, apple, pineapple  
75 g banana | 1 small unit or medium-sized |

**Discussion**

The EVASYON study is a multidisciplinary and multicentre programme for overweight/obese adolescents that involved the management of dietary habits, physical activity and psychological profiles, in order to lower adiposity and prevent the development of chronic adult disease related to obesity such as diabetes, hypertension, and metabolic syndrome.
according to the work plan of the project with specific workshops and seminars, in order to reduce inter-individual (inter-centre) variations. Moreover, the teaching material and protocols for the different worksheets of the project were available for all centers through a continuously updated website.39

Many different approaches and therapies have been proposed for weight loss treatment in obese and overweight children.15,42,43,44 Unbalanced hypocaloric diets or very low calorie diets probably lack essential vitamins and minerals and should not be recommended during the period of growth.

Programmes including moderate calorie restriction and physical exercise have achieved better results than diet only, showing decreases in total body fat mass, and cardiovascular risk factors, maintaining total body fat-free mass, as well as improving insulin sensitivity and lipid profile, such as an increase of high density lipoprotein cholesterol fraction (HDL-c) levels.16,43,45,46,47,48 The magnitude of the energy restriction together with the duration of the trial are always a challenge, but more especially in this population group. In adolescents, energy requirement and micronutrient intake are critical issues for appropriate growth and development.33 Our strategy consisted of a moderate calorie restriction for a limited period of time (9 weeks) followed by a maintenance period with a balanced non calorie-restricted diet. In the literature, trials with obese adolescents used different calorie restriction ranges varying from 600 kcal/day to 1,800 kcal/day.15,43,49,50 In the current study, a supply of total energy between 1,300 kcal/day and 2,200 kcal/day for participants was indicated according to the degree of obesity.

It is important to mention that breakfast apparently provides considerable protection for future obesity in adulthood.33 We strongly recommended three food groups (dairy products, cereals and fruit) to be included in menus.33,52 Semi-skimmed milk, low fat yoghurts and fresh cheese were also recommended as healthy choices to cover the daily needs of calcium, and contribute to the protein content of the diet.33,52

Due to the large evidence on the protective effect of olive oil on body weight and lipid control,53,54 olive oil was recommended as the principal fat source for cooking and dressing meals. To complete the daily nutrient requirements with healthy foods, common choices presented in menus for dinner were vegetables and salads, soups, cereals, eggs, fish and lean meats while for dessert fresh fruit or yoghurt were encouraged.

Furthermore, observational data support that consuming large portions of energy-dense foods could play a role in the etiology of obesity.6,55 A reduction in the consumption of canned juices and soft drinks containing excess sugar and additives, meat servings, eating away from home, and portion size15,56 should be

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Classify the following foods into main food groups (cereals, vegetables, fruits, dairy products, meat, fish, pulses, dry fruits, cold meats, fats, pastries, sweets):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lentils</th>
<th>Rice</th>
<th>Chard</th>
<th>Carrots</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Banana</td>
<td>Green beans</td>
<td>Sardine</td>
<td>Leek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chickpeas</td>
<td>Sole</td>
<td>Kiwi</td>
<td>Cauliflower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponge cake</td>
<td>Cookies</td>
<td>Chicken</td>
<td>Cabbage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olive oil</td>
<td>Veal</td>
<td>Lettuce and tomato</td>
<td>Macaroni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French Omelette</td>
<td>Pork loin</td>
<td>Beef liver</td>
<td>Yogurt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabbit</td>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>Noodle soup</td>
<td>Pear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sirloin steak</td>
<td>Milk</td>
<td>Apple</td>
<td>Beans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boiled ham</td>
<td>Courgette</td>
<td>Grapefruit</td>
<td>Pineapple juice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuts</td>
<td>Cured ham</td>
<td>Sliced bread</td>
<td>Strawberries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marmalade</td>
<td>Butter</td>
<td>Sugar</td>
<td>Borage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheese</td>
<td>Croissant</td>
<td>White bread</td>
<td>Hazelnuts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peanuts</td>
<td>Lemon</td>
<td>Salmon</td>
<td>Potatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hake</td>
<td>Spinach</td>
<td>Crème caramel</td>
<td>Cardoon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Which three do you like best?
Which three do you like least?
Do you know what the following are: Proteins, Carbohydrates, Lipids, Vitamins and Minerals? (Explain them briefly).
How would you define the term Balanced Diet?
encouraged together with increased consumption of moisture-rich foods such as fruits and vegetables, legumes, fish and cereals. These messages seem to be effective in preventing weight gain and promoting weight loss.6,44,55,57 In conclusion, the dietary intervention of the EVASYON programme was developed to improve nutritional education in order to achieve food behavior modification. A moderate calorie restriction for a limited period of time seems to be a good strategy in treating overweight/obese adolescent since it is crucial to maintain their appropriate growth and development. Moreover, combining fixed plan with free-choice menus helps adolescent and their families make the right decisions for every day meals.

Competing interests

The author(s) declare that they have no competing interests7.

Authors’ contributions

MM and AdM contributed equally to this work. AsM, AmM and CC designed the study and obtained funding. The RDs MM, TR, BZ, PR and PM intensively participated in the dietary intervention study. All authors provided insight into the study design and contributed to the drafts and approved the final version.

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References