Abstract

Background: University students are a part of the population potentially vulnerable in relation to their nutritional status. Objectives: To evaluate energy intake, energy profile of the diet and prevalence of underweight, overweight and obesity in university students.

Methods: The study was conducted in 223 students (53% female) from the University of Murcia (Spain), mean age 21.4 ± 2.7 years. Dietary intake was estimated by a continuous 7 days dietary record, previously validated. Afterwards, total energy intake and macronutrients distribution were obtained using the software “GRUNUMUR 2.0”. Physical activity was assessed by a questionnaire. Weight and height were measured and body mass index was calculated as [weight (kg)/height (m)²]. Results and discussion: Average energy intake was lower than the recommendations. In relation with the energy profile of the diet, it was higher in protein and fat, and lower in carbohydrates compared with the recommendations in the balanced diet. The prevalence of overweight was of 9.3% in female and of 24.2% in males. However, 10.2% females and 1.1% males were underweight. Only a 35.4% of the studied collective usually practiced physical activity (3-4 hours/week). Significant correlations were found between age and percentage of energy from carbohydrate (negative) and lipids (positive), indicating that older students (young adults) had significantly higher dietary unbalances than younger (adolescents). Conclusion: Students from the University of Murcia have characteristics very similar to those described in other university populations of Spain and other Western countries: low energy intake, unbalances in the energy profile of the diet, and high percentages of overweight and also of underweight. Both physical inactivity and energy unbalance of the diet could be determinants of the overweight observed. Age is a factor in worsening the energy profile of the diet, which presumably will have undesirable consequences on the health of this young population group.

Keywords