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Health behaviour and eating habits among foreign students at the Instituto Politécnico de Bragança

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INTRODUCTION: Several studies have addressed to assess the eating habits of university students, but only few studies are about the eating habits of foreign students. Previous studies found that the eating habits are changing in a negative way because of the limited availability and poor quality of familiar foods (Papadaki, 2002). Our current aim is to determine the eating habits of the students before their arrival to Portugal. This is the first part of a longitudinal study, our final aim is to determine the changes the eating habits and health behaviour of students from abroad during their scholarship.

METHODS: For our cross-sectional study the data was obtained from an online survey. 53 of the 89 students who started their studies in the second semester at the academic year of 2013/2014 completed the questionnaire. The questionnaire contains questions about the health related behaviour, eating habits and a food frequency questionnaire (FFQ). We accomplished the statistical analyses with SPSS version 22.0. We used descriptive statistics, Chi-square-test Fisher’s exact test and t-test to analyse the data. The results were considered significant if p<0,05.

RESULTS: 24 male and 29 female students took part in our research from 13 different countries. The mean of their age was 21,87 ± 1,52 years, there was no significant difference between the genders according to the age. The mean of the Body Mass Index (BMI) was 21,85 ± 2,09 kg/m2 with significantly higher BMI for males (p=0,001). According to World Health Organisation guidelines 2 participants were considered as underweighted, 48 normal-weighted and 3 as overweighted. We splitted the participants into two groups: frequently sporters and less frequently sporters. The frequently sporters consumed significantly more often red meat (p=0,004), fish and seafood (p=0,013), less often sweets (p=0,020). The less frequently sporters consumed significantly more often alcoholic drinks (p=0,0017). Females consumed wholegrain cereal significantly more often (p=0,023) and significantly less energy drinks (p=0,002). Males consumed potatoes significantly more often (p=0,006) and less olive oil (p=0,025).

CONCLUSION: The results are being in process. According to our results those students who did sports more often had healthier eating habits. We observed that there were not outstanding differences between the genders. According to our current results, the nutritional status of foreign students at Instituto Politécnico de Bragança is considered to be normal.