MEASURING NUTRITION LITERACY ON A PORTUGUESE POPULATION

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Introduction: Nutrition plays a role in the prevention and treatment of chronic diseases. In order to promote healthy eating habits, and consequently reduce obesity and associated diseases, it is important that the population possesses an adequate knowledge on food and nutrition.

Objectives: To measure the nutrition knowledge of a Portuguese population, residing in the Lisbon area.

Methods: This is a descriptive and analytical study of 101 volunteers living in the Lisbon area, with ages ranging from 18 to 74 years old. The assessment of nutrition knowledge was achieved through the application of an adapted version of the Nutritional Knowledge Questionnaire. Statistical analysis was performed using the computer software PSPP, version 0.8.5. From the sum of the scores given for each variable, an average of correct answers was calculated and used as a basis for the creation of a categorized nutrition score.

Results: From the 101 volunteers inquired, 59 were female (58.4%) and 42 were male (41.6%). Most of the tested subjects were 18 to 24 years old (42.6%). The issues which revealed a lesser knowledge were those related to the topic fats. For example, only 27 (26.3%) of the subjects recognized dairy foods as containing saturated fats. Moreover, about 70% of the population knew the number of recommended daily fruit portions. Using the scale of literacy in nutrition (scores between 0 to 105), created for the Portuguese population, it was verified that 49.5% of the sample gave between 63 to 87 correct answers, showing a medium level of literacy in nutrition.

Conclusions: This study allowed not only to know the nutrition literacy of a Portuguese population but also to create a Portuguese nutrition literacy scale which can be applied to all the population after validation.

Keywords: Nutrition literacy. Scale. Food. Portugal.