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**The Khabarovsk residents’ conceptions of food as a component of healthy lifestyle**

*The article is mainstreaming healthy lifestyle issues, risk factors for diseases and the influence of healthy lifestyle on the health status of the population. The Khabarovsk residents’ feeding practices, their conceptions of rational nutrition and diet have been analyzed. Feeding habits, compositions, quality, balance and calorie contents of food, consumed by the citizens of Khabarovsk have been evaluated. Also gender and age differences of feeding practices have taken place in the research. The article is written on the basis of sociological research, devoted to the issue of risk factors for diseases and Khabarovsk citizens’ commitment to maintaining a healthy lifestyle. The article provides data based on questionnaires and the results of focus-groups on the stated issue.*

**Представления населения о питании как элементе**

**здорового образа жизни**

*В статье актуализируется проблема здорового образа жизни, факторов риска заболеваемости и показано влияние правильного питания на состояние здоровья населения. Проводится анализ практик питания жителей г. Хабаровска, их представлений о рациональном питании, о режиме питания, оцениваются пищевые привычки, состав, качество, сбалансированность и калорийность продуктов, употребляемых населением г. Хабаровска, анализируются гендерные и возрастные различия практик питания. Статья написана на основе проведенного социологического исследования, посвященного факторам риска заболеваемости и приверженности жителей г. Хабаровска к ведению здорового образа жизни, приводятся данные анкетного опроса и результаты фокус-групп по данной тематике трех возрастных категорий.*

***Keywords:*** *healthy lifestyle, proper nutrition, diet, insufficient nutrition, risk factor.*

***Ключевые слова:*** *здоровый образ жизни, правильное питание, режим питания, нерациональное питание, некачественное питание, фактор риска.*

The issue of public health has become national and regional priority in social policy. Recently public health in Russian society has become not only medical and biological, but also a social issue, which determines quality and reproduction its human potential. High prevalence of risk factors among Khabarovsk citizens, such as smoking, alcohol consumption, poor nutrition, physical and mental struggle, lead to the big problems, connected with physical and moral public health. They arise from people’s low motivation to leading a healthy lifestyle and a range of objective conditions: undeveloped recreation facilities, limited accessibility of healthcare services. At the same time, according to experts, medical systems and healthcare influence people’s health only in an amount of 10-15%. The rest depends on healthy lifestyle.

Healthy diet is an important component of population’s healthy lifestyle. It involves moderate eating habits, perfectly corresponding person’s physiological characteristics and also awareness about the quality of the food, which is being consumed. Unhealthy diet is a primal risk factor for health.

Healthy diet is the one, which provides growth, normal development and vital activity of a person, which contributes to health promotion and disease prevention. Keeping to a healthy diet in combination with regular exercise reduces risk of chronic diseases and disorders, such as overweight, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, high blood pressure and cancer.

According to Rosstat today cardiovascular diseases (heart attacks, strokes, coronary heart diseases, atherosclerosis and hypertension) take first place among the causes of death (55% of total deaths). And, if earlier the latter were considered as age-related diseases, now they got much "younger", 60% of heart attacks occur to people under the age of 50 years. [1] The doctors say that virtually all cases of vascular and cardiac diseases in Russia are caused by bad lifestyle including diet. Often, people are poorly informed about the dangers of certain food. Aggressive advertising promotes food that causes irreparable damage to health. It doesn’t include only fast food and sugary sodas. It also includes products of the processed meat and fatty dairy products. In the last decade, the level of population’s welfare has grown, but the quality of food hasn’t increased, it has deteriorated. With the growth of the population’s welfare people got used to the semi-finished products, fast food, etc., the so-called junk food. It includes all the junk food products with harmful additives as preservatives or after industrial processing, which deprives the food’s natural minerals and vitamins. Such food can only satisfy a person’s hunger, but cannot give the human body all that it needs. This foodstuff contains a lot of carbohydrates, fats, and salt and food additives. Food with "empty calories" is produced in a variety of shapes and is advertised aggressively. It is popular among consumers because it has a vibrant taste; it does not have to be cooked and can be eaten in any situation.

Nowadays, the actual nutrition of the population in most regions of the country does not meet the recommended physiological norms of food consumption. According to the socio-hygienic monitoring 99% of Russians are deficient in protein intake, while fat is consumed above the norm (87.3% of the population receive this component of nutrition in excess). Absolute majority of medical advisors now recognize that excessive consumption of fat in food can lead to deposits of harmful substances in the arteries. Fat intake also contributes to the free radicals formation, which in turn leads to destruction of cells, weakening the immune system and the rapid aging. Consumption of the food with high fat (about 40% of total calories) is directly related to the level of such diseases as strokes and heart attacks, hypertension and diabetes. [2] According to the sanitary inspection office of Federal Service for Oversight of Consumer Protection and Welfare, every third family does not comply with the diet, and 30% of parents allow their children to eat unhealthy foods [3].

Along with other diseases provoked by poor nutrition, today a significant place is occupied by the problem of obesity - a serious, chronic multifactorial disease. It presupposes not only excessive accumulation of adipose tissue the body and a cosmetic defect. Obesity is associated with disorders, affecting the locomotor system (arthrosis); gastrointestinal tract (pancreatitis, cholecystitis, cholelithiasis); the heart (coronary heart disease, hypertension); vessels (varicose veins); reproductive system (infertility).

Obesity accelerates the aging process, degrades the quality of life. According to statistics, more than 25% of Russians currently obese. Sedentary lifestyle and poor nutrition - two reasons why the obesity epidemic reached Russia. There is a growing tendency toward high-calorie intake, fatty foods, which is characterized by the lack of vitamins and minerals. Adding low physical activity to that leads to obesity [4].

Balanced diet is also characterized by a frequency of meals. Even today scientists haven’t come to a clear and univocal answer for the question: "How many times and how often should I eat?". At the same time, the research results suggest that at least three meals a day has to be set a priority [5].

Analyzing the data of sociological research, it should be noted that most of Khabarovsk population adhere to diet, including three or four daily meals everyday (71.8%). At the same time, every fifth person eats 1-2 times a day, and a small number of respondents (9.2%) have5-6 meals a day. A similar trend is fairly stable in recent years [6].

Waiver of breakfast is a fairly common practice. The Research Institute in Tasmania, Menses, had a unique study that proves that the rejection of breakfast for a long period can lead to an increased risk of cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

Breakfast is not only useful for weight loss; it maintains the level of insulin and cholesterol in blood and thus reduces the likelihood of developing heart diseases and diabetes. People should strive to have a healthy, balanced diet, and regular breakfast is an important part of it. [7] However, the citizens of Khabarovsk often neglect breakfast, explaining it by the lack of time. Only 61.7% said they eat breakfast every day, and one fifth does it rarely or even skips this meal.

The study shows that adults are more responsible for breakfasts. So among the elderly people, aged 60 years and older 79.4% prefer to have breakfast, only 4.8% do not have breakfast at all, in the age group of 45-59 years - 67.9% and 7.5% correspondingly. At the same time about 15% among younger people refuse to breakfast (Table 1) [6].

*Table 1*

**Distribution of answers to the question of the availability of breakfast**

**in the different age categories [6]**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Possible answers** | **Respondents’ age** | | | | |
| **18 – 22**  **years** | **23 – 29**  **years** | **30 – 44**  **years** | **45 – 59 years** | **60 and older** |
| Daily | 50,6% | 56,2% | 55,5% | 67,9% | 79,4% |
| Often | 16,1% | 13,3% | 14,9% | 12,3% | 11,0% |
| Rarely | 17,3% | 15,9% | 14,0% | 12,3% | 4,8% |
| I do not eat breakfast | 15,5% | 14,6% | 15,6% | 7,5% | 4,8% |
| in total | 100,0% | 100,0% | 100,0% | 100,0% | 100,0% |

The results of focus groups show that mostly young and middle-aged population neglect breakfast, "... in the morning I’m not making it to have breakfast, only tea. And some light food like a sandwich ... "," ... Coffee, certainly some kind of bun or a pie... "; "... In the morning I don’t have time to eat. For lunch I have a tea with candy or cookies at work... ". However, there are those who think breakfast is an integral part of a daily diet, "... we are accustomed to eating porridge in the morning. So the morning starts with porridge for us... "; ... "Breakfast – is always porridge, we really like the oatmeal ..."; "... In the morning I mainly have sandwiches; I eat cereals, but not much ..."; "... In the morning I eat a lot of things, because I think breakfast is the basis of everything. I eat everything: no matter fat or low-fat. I prefer buckwheat, rice, cottage cheese with sour cream and snacks ... ". But almost all of older people include breakfast in their diet, "... Breakfast is always necessary, for dinner I can have yogurt with crackers or bun. For lunch I eat boiled potatoes, cucumbers, and fried fish. Lunch can be shifting, but I never miss it ... "[6].

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends consuming enough fruits and vegetables, i. e., at least three species and three times a day. A study in England, which was conducted over 12 years (2001-2013), suggests that the more respondents consumed fruit and vegetables, the less they were likely to die at any age. Eating fruits and vegetables reduces the risk of developing cancer and heart disease by 25 and 31 percent, correspondingly.

According to WHO’s recommendations and research, including the territory of Russia, the consumer basket was revised in 2015. As a result of this research the number of fruits and vegetables in it has been increased. Nevertheless, consumer practices of the Khabarovsk residents do not meet the recommended standards. So 41.8% of respondents consume fresh vegetables and fruits daily, 38.5% – sometimes, and 16.4% do it at least once a week.

Among the Khabarovsk residents only a tenth part consumes a sufficient number of kinds of vegetables and fruits, and a third of those surveyed consume 2 or less types, which is much lower than the recommended amount. (Table 2) The weight of consumed vegetables and fruits is also generally not consistent with the recommendations [6].

*Table 2*

**The amount of kinds of fresh vegetables and fruits consumed by the Khabarovsk residents (% of Respondents) [6]**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Possible answers** | **%** |
| 1. 5 and more kinds of fresh vegetables and fruits daily | 12,7 |
| 2. 2-4 kinds of fresh vegetables and fruits daily | 54,9 |
| 3. 2 and less kinds of fresh vegetables and fruits daily | 32,4 |

Young participants of the focus groups consume vegetables and fruit less often than other age groups, "... not much, it happens that in general I don’t eat vegetables. I don’t have time to go to the groceries, and they get rotten quickly, so I don’t buy them... "; "... Vegetables are perishable, but I can take fruits to the gym, so I eat fruits, not vegetables..."; "... Fruits are optional, and I eat vegetables rarely for dinner ..."; "... At home I have fruits and vegetables, but I don’t eat them as I don’t have enough time for that...". Although many claim to include them in the daily diet, "... I try to eat a salad with cucumbers and tomatoes, adding a lot of parsley and dill ..."; "... I often eat potatoes, vegetables and fruits. It is healthy and we have many of them at home... "; "... I eat tomatoes often, I’m very fond of vegetables for dinner, and I take an apple with me every day. I like these products, and they are healthy ... ".

Among the middle-aged people almost all focus group participants told that they eat fruits and vegetables, "... every day we have a vegetable salad: cabbage, pumpkin, zucchini. I love it as well as my children. We also eat onions fruits, in summer we make that emphasis... "; "... In summer I try to buy them at the market. I try to buy Russian fruits, not Chinese... "; "... As for the vegetables, it goes seasonal too. I try to buy them from local sellers. I pay particular attention to the fact that the product is being produced locally. Never buy Chinese foods. In winter I fundamentally never buy cucumbers and tomatoes - mostly carrots and beets... ". In addition to the poor quality of imported Chinese vegetables and fruits, participants referred to the financial limitations; "... if the finances allowed me to, I would only buy cherry and strawberry at the harvest time...".

Elderly people have noted the need of fruits and vegetables to maintain the vitality"... for me it’s number one. I spend half of my money on the fruit. During summer, my favorite fruit is nectarine every year. Apples also. I have read that it is good for heart to eat watermelons, melons, as they meet body's needs and wash kidneys... ". However, the recommended variety and quantity of consumed fruits and vegetables is still not kept, "... I consume vegetables selectively, as I can’t eat Chinese tomatoes and cucumbers..."; "... I’m trying to buy fruits from Krasnodar. Every day we are having different kinds of fruit; in summer we eat vegetables, which we grew ourselves: cucumbers, peppers, eggplants, tomatoes. But in winter I don’t buy Chinese ones ... "; "... We eat apples and plums. I try to buy the ones from Krasnodar and Netherlands. I feel the need for more vegetables ...".

In general, the diet of Khabarovsk residents can be characterized as unbalanced, especially among young and middle-aged people, "... in the afternoon I usually eat fixings with meat, chicken or fish, because it’s not convenient for me to take liquid food to work. In the evening we eat bakery products, as well as meat. In general, we eat everything. I do not deny myself any food. In the evening I can even eat deserts, cakes and pies"; "... I’m always having snacks like coffee and chocolate, which is bad for me. I prefer protein, high carbohydrate foods, such as chicken breast, buckwheat, seafood, etc. ... "; "... My food is mostly snacks, sandwiches on the go, which I can eat in the car: a pizza or something like that, so that I could eat while going through the traffic jam, because I have really little time..."; "... I fell lucky to eat normal food like dairy products, pasta and soups. Occasionally it happens, but usually I only eat tea with a hot dog at my University... ".

Results of the study show that the percentage of people with an unbalanced intake of fresh fruits and vegetables in Khabarovsk is almost half the population (48.53%). The proportion of people with poor intake of fresh fruits and vegetables is 40.12% [6].

The quality of food intake is expressed in its calorific content. The greatest number of useful substances contains in the low-calorie products; and high-calorie foods contain high fat, trans fat, sugar and various chemical compounds, that are harmful to the body. Daily diet consisting of low-calorie foods rich in fiber, vitamins and minerals is much higher quality, than consummation of high-calorie products on a daily basis. However, these well-known facts, do not contribute to a better selection of food basket among the residents of Khabarovsk. 40.1% of respondents never look at the calorific content of the purchased products, 11.6% know nothing about it, only 12.1% do it often, and 18.3% do it sometimes.

Females are usually more aware of the caloric content of foods and pay attention to calorific value more often than males. 37.5% of women watch calorific value of food often or sometimes, while 21.6% of men do so. Nearly half (46.5%) male respondents never do so, and 15.5% didn’t know anything about it. It is also confirmed by the statement of a man in the focus group, "... I don’t really look at the calories and composition. I guess, males usually get information about food from packaging. If the packaging looks good, I take the product. If I liked the product, I’ll buy it next time. My wife doesn’t look at the compounds either. We don’t have such an aim, and I don’t understand them. I know that certain compounds are bad for health, but I don’t remember their names. I guess that is a common male approach" [6].

Also awareness of the need to take into account calorific value of food depends on the age of the respondents. Middle-aged people usually pay more attention to this indicator than the young and the elderly (Table 3) [6].

*Table 3*

**Age distribution of answers to the question "Do you pay attention to the energy value (caloric content) of food when you buy it?" [6]**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Possible answers** | **Age** | | | | |
| **18 – 22 years** | **23 – 29 years** | **30 – 44 years** | **45 – 59 years** | **60 years and older** |
| Often | 13,5% | 11,6% | 13,4% | 12,3% | 9,1% |
| Sometimes | 14,7% | 15,0% | 21,8% | 23,4% | 13,4% |
| Rarely | 20,6% | 24,0% | 19,7% | 13,1% | 11,5% |
| Never | 43,5% | 39,9% | 34,6% | 38,1% | 48,8% |
| I know nothing about it | 7,7% | 9,5% | 10,5% | 13,1% | 17,2% |
| in total | 100,0% | 100,0% | 100,0% | 100,0% | 100,0% |

The results of focus groups show that representatives of all age groups almost do not look at calorific value of food, "... I don’t look at calories, although children sometimes tell me to start doing it..."; "... I do not consider it important. I only want my food to have organic composition"; "... But calorific value is not fundamental. Because we are like: if I want it, I need it; If I don’t want it, I won’t take it... "; "I don’t really look at the calories. Although I might notice it, when it comes to some yogurts... ".

However, many people look at expiration dates and the composition, "... I’m always looking at the composition and shelf life. Shelf life that is not overdue and I try to take the one, which is closer to the present day ... "; "... I look for the food that has less of any additives, E-contents and soy ..."; "... I strictly check expiration dates everywhere .... ", i.e. culture of food consumption increases, so the shelf life and composition of products are important for food selection, but there are also those who do not check the quality of consumed food, "... I don’t look at it, I have a good intuition ..."; "... I don’t bother myself with it, so I don’t worry ..."; "... I do not look, because I do not take rubbish. I know the calorie content, I don’t take anything new ... " such flatness was showed mostly by the young people.

Older people say,"... we are not accustomed to calories...".

Research shows that people with higher education are more aware of the need to take into account the index of calories in the preparation of their diet (Table 4) [6].

*Table 4*

**Distribution by the level of education each of the respondents’ answers to the question "Do you pay attention to the energy value when buying food**

**(caloric content)?" [6]**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Possible answers** | **The level of education** | | | | |
| **higher** | **secondary vocational** | **initial vocational** | **High School** | **primary** |
| Often | 13,9% | 8,2% | 9,8% | 13,7% | 9,5% |
| Sometimes | 21,3% | 15,5% | 24,4% | 12,4% | 4,8% |
| Rarely | 18,7% | 18,2% | 4,9% | 17,0% | 19,0% |
| Never | 37,3% | 43,3% | 36,6% | 44,4% | 52,4% |
| I know nothing about it | 8,9% | 14,8% | 24,4% | 12,4% | 14,3% |
| in total | 100,0% | 100,0% | 100,0% | 100,0% | 100,0% |

Another indicator of a balanced diet is the consumption of carbonated and energy drinks. These drinks do not benefit the body, and can cause harm when used in large quantities.

Carbonated drinks are rich in calories, which get absorbed easily by tricking body’s protective systems. One feels full for a very short time after drinking a bottle of sweet water. American scientists proved in their studies that people, who drink more than three cans of drinks a day, get cancer 87% more. Doctors have found out, that there is a direct dependency: regular consumption of sweet carbonated water leads to the increase of women’s heart diseases and blood vessels. They are 35% more likely to suffer heart diseases. [8] Now energy drinks are even prohibited everywhere except pharmacies and some European countries because of the deaths they caused. Frequent consumption of energy drinks leads to exhaustion, nervous overexcitation, and these, in turn, lead to the increase of fatigue, insomnia, irritability, nervous breakdowns, and depression.

Energy drinks consumption is more common among males. 15.3% of them often consume such drinks, only 29.9% never do this, and 42.5% of females do not consume energy drinks.

According to the research, sweet carbonated water and energy drinks are products for the younger generation, so the youngest respondents consume more of them than respondents of other age groups do. Nearly half of young people (49.7%) often or sometimes drink soda and energy drinks, while only 12.9% of elderly people (60 years and older) do this, and more than half of them (66.3%) don’t drink them at all. (Table 5) [6]

*Table 5*

**Age distribution of the frequency of sugary carbonated**

**and energy drinks consumption[6]**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Possible answers** | **Age** | | | | |
| **18 – 22 years** | **23 – 29 years** | **30 – 44 years** | **45 – 59 years** | **60 and older** |
| Never | 15,0% | 22,3% | 31,0% | 48,6% | 66,3% |
| Seldom | 35,3% | 36,5% | 34,6% | 28,3% | 20,7% |
| Sometimes | 26,9% | 21,9% | 23,6% | 18,3% | 9,1% |
| Frequently | 22,8% | 19,3% | 10,7% | 4,8% | 3,8% |
| In total | 100,0% | 100,0% | 100,0% | 100,0% | 100,0% |

According to the results of focus groups majority of the population does not drink carbonated and energy drinks, because they are bad for health and they don’t meet required taste preferences, "... I don’t drink them, because I don’t like them...". The elderly people are being especially categorical, "... I don’t drink them at all. I can only drink "Lastichka" or "Medvezhka” when I have hearburn..."; "... I drink filtered water and make compotes. Even when I see other people buy these colored drinks, I ask them why they take that rubbish…"; "... They have so much sugar and sweeteners. I don’t drink anything carbonated…"

But younger generation is not ready to give up energy drinks, as they help these young people to get vigorous and enduring, "... I drink energy drinks almost every day, because I’m really sleepy..."; "... I drink juice and soda seldom and energy drinks pretty often"; "... I feel the need for it because of my sleepiness, so I drink energy drinks, juice and soda…". Although, some of them have already felt the negative impact, so they stopped consuming energy drinks, "... I used to drink energy drinks until I started reading compounds. I also used to drink soda, but now I don’t do it, as I realized they are bad for my health... "; "... my stomach starts hurting when I drink soda, so I don’t drink it at all...".

In general, Khabarovsk residents recognize nutrition as the most important component of healthy lifestyle. Therefore, the results of focus groups show that majority of the population in different age groups consider healthy and proper nutrition as a component of healthy lifestyle. The middle-aged residents described healthy lifestyle in this manner: "... it includes sport, movement, nutrition, not overindulging, and habits ...", "... proper nutrition and using your spare time for good ...", "... I guess it includes putting healthy nutrition on the first place... "," ... a proper diet and exercises, I guess ... ". Young people also highlight healthy diet as a component of healthy lifestyle, "healthy lifestyle includes doing on for sports and proper nutrition"; "... In fact, healthy lifestyle includes so many aspects, and proper nutrition is among them"; "... Proper nutrition is very important for an athlete ...", "... proper nutrition, getting enough sleep, drinking much water ...". However, elderly people consider physical activity as a component of healthy lifestyle, and almost no one from this age group mentioned proper nutrition. [6]

Hereby, in general it can be noted that the population of Khabarovsk realize the importance of proper and healthy diet. However, the study results show that not everyone is ready to keep to a balanced diet, and sometimes the reasons are quite impersonal, "...I don’t have time to get enough sleep, to eat properly – I eat only snacks…”; "... I don’t even have time to eat. I can eat once in two days, as I’ve been studying in many places, took driving lessons and went to the gym. I am an A+ student, so I have no time to sleep or eat... ". Among the factors that hinder maintaining healthy lifestyle, were mentioned financial factor and the fact that it gets difficult to buy high-quality food in regional conditions, as shops and markets are full of Chinese products, which do not meet the requirements, "... Chinese products are bad in contrast with the local ones ".

Achieving high food culture of the city’s population is only possible if people will come to personal awareness of the need and importance for the health and proper healthy diet. For this purpose, it is necessary to inform people about the rules of good nutrition and its role in maintaining and promoting health, as well as formatting ideas about the socio-cultural aspects of food as a component of general human culture.

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