

Dietary habits of children and adolescents attending an Out-patient Clinic for the Prevention and Management of Overweight and Obesity in Greece



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The authors have no financial relationship(s) to disclose relevant to this poster presentation

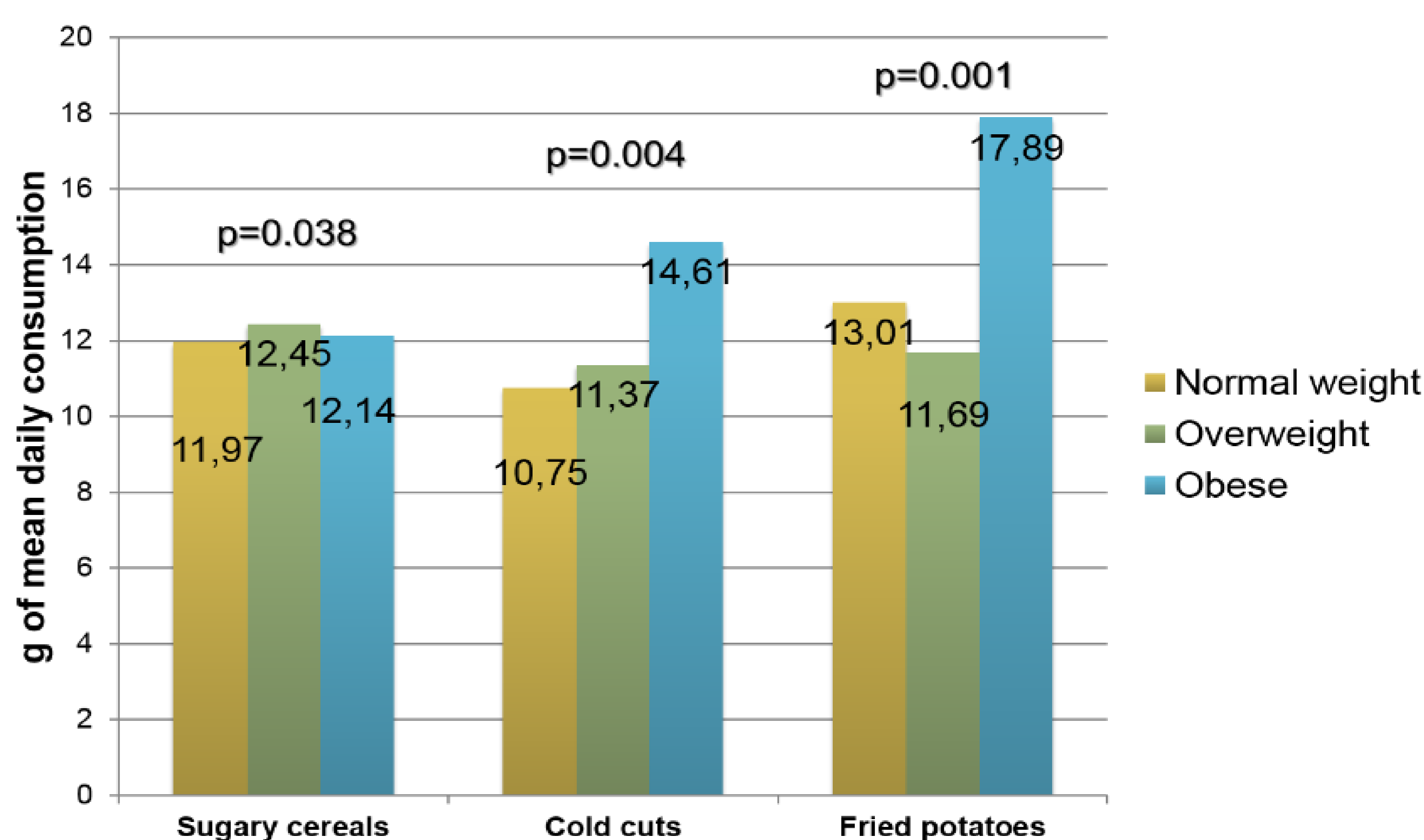
Background: Obesity in childhood and adolescence represents a major health problem. Its management requires a multidisciplinary approach by health professionals of various specialties, such as pediatricians, pediatric endocrinologists, dieticians, gymnasts, and pediatric psychologists and psychiatrists.

Objective and hypotheses: The aim of the present study was to assess the main eating habits of children and adolescents attending an Out-patient Clinic for the Prevention and Management of Overweight and Obesity in Greece, as recorded before implementing any intervention.

Methods: We studied 1005 children and adolescents (age range 1-18 years, 452 (45%) boys, 553 (55%) girls, 52.4% pre-pubertal, 47.6% pubertal) attending our Out-patient Clinic. According to their body mass index (BMI), subjects were classified as obese, overweight or of normal BMI. On the first Clinic visit, patients and/or their parents completed the semi-quantitative food frequency questionnaire "ToyBox", which records the frequency and the habitual amount of consumption of the main food groups, as well as the breakfast eating habits. The mean daily consumption of each food group was then estimated.

Results: Of the total sample, 12% of children and adolescents had normal BMI, 27% were overweight and 61% were obese. There was no statistically significant difference in the frequency of breakfast eating among different BMI categories. Nevertheless, significant differences were observed regarding children's usual consumption of several food groups among different BMI categories.

•Overweight children consumed more sugary cereals ($P=0.038$), while obese children more meat products ($P=0.004$) and fries ($P=0.001$).



- A statistically significant difference was also observed for the type of pasta consumed (white or whole wheat), with the obese children mainly consuming white ($P=0.009$).
- The boys drank more soft drinks daily and ate more sugary cereals, white and brown bread, meat and cold cuts ($P<0.05$), while the girls drank more milk ($P<0.001$).
- Consumption of soft drinks, chocolate and savory snacks increased along with age group ($P<0.05$), but the opposite was observed for milk ($P = 0.029$).
- Comparing with the other age groups, 12-15 year-old children consumed more treats, sugary cereals, bread, meat and cold cuts ($P<0.05$).
- Finally, a statistically significant association was observed between children's and their parent's BMI ($P<0.001$).

Conclusions: The eating habits of children and adolescents attending our Out-patient Clinic for the Prevention and Management of Overweight and Obesity were associated with BMI, gender and age group. The expected effect of parental BMI on children's BMI is also worth noting.

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