

Affordability of a balanced diet in Belgium

Is it possible to eat healthy for 5 euro per day?

Background and objectives

- The cost of healthy food is often considered as a barrier in implementing a balanced diet.
- In Belgium, people eat too much meat, poultry and meat products (25% of food budget), and too little of fruit and vegetables (16% of food budget).
- This study was aimed to establish whether it is possible to meet the Belgian nutritional recommendations for a **daily food cost lower than 5 euro**.
- Its results were used to set up tools for a public health information campaign.

Results

- Average daily cost of the theoretical menus was lower than 5 euro, except for adult men (5.13 euro).
- Most nutrient intake covered at least 75% of the recommended daily intake for the Belgian population.
- Several tools were set up based on those findings, including a table classifying protein sources based on nutritional value and price, and a set of 24 cooking recipes of good nutritional value for a low price.

Figure 1. Daily food cost

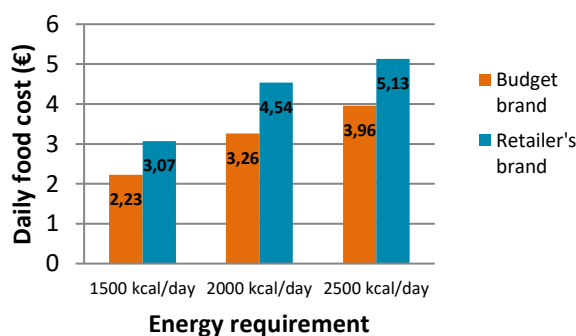
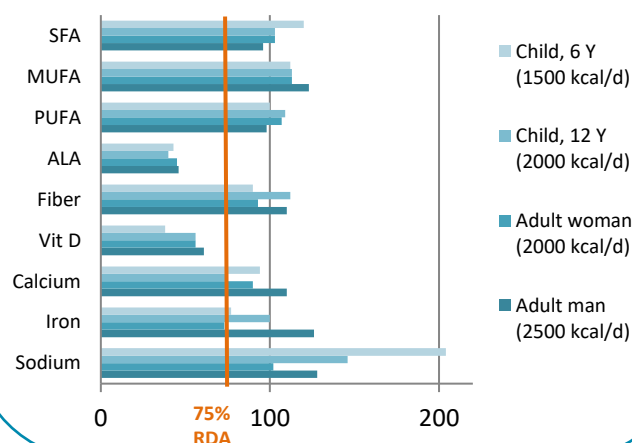


Figure 2. % RDA



Material and methods

- Nutritional quality of main food products in Belgium was assessed based on nutritional criteria (data of Belgian food composition table).
- Average food cost was assessed comparing websites of Belgian supermarkets (1240 food items).
- Food offering good nutritional quality/price ratio was identified.
- Balanced food menus integrating these food items were established, for several seasons and several theoretical energy requirements (1500, 2000 and 2500 kcal/day), for children, women and men.
- The price and nutritional values of these menus were calculated and the average nutritional values were compared to Belgian nutritional recommendations.

Conclusion

- It is possible to eat healthy for a limited amount of money.
- This requires to consume mainly **home cooked meals** and requires minimum cooking skills and material, as well as the management of the grocery shopping and the limitation of the food leftovers.
- This study is a good example of a **collaboration** between a **Higher Education Institute** and a **public health national association**, through the work of a student in dietetics, the expertise of the department of dietetics at Institut Paul Lambin, and the implementation of the study results in order to conceive educational material for a public health campaign (Viasano).



References

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- Vinck J et al. (2016) Downwards trends in the prevalence of childhood overweight in two pilot towns taking part in the VIASANO community-based programme in Belgium: data from a national school health monitoring system. *Pediatr Obes* 11:61-7.