

Diet, nutrition and dietary supplements consumption, between myth and reality

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Currently setting a bio-social frame, research shows that nutrition represents a voluntary, conscious and educable process (Williams, 2016). Keeping the same context, we talk about nutrition as a complex process that involves digesting food and turning it into absorbable nutrients and waste disposal.

Worldwide presented statistical data shows that the following figures are in a strong conflict: while malnutrition affects 1 out of 2 inhabitants of the planet, there are about 1.5 billion overweight people and 500 million are obese (Godfray, & Garnett, 2014).

In the US, one out of three adults is overweight, a person out of three is obese and thereby only one adult out of three is in normal weight ranges. Currently 40% of non-transmissible diseases deaths are due to the consumption of high calorie foods, salt, saturated fat acids, unsaturated fat acids and sugar, while the low consumption of fruits and vegetables causes 1.5 million deaths each year (Flegal, Carroll, Ogden, & Curtin, 2010).

Studies showed that in the US and EU there is similar issues related to food habits and the nutritional state of the body such as (Berghöfer, Pischon, Reinhold, Apovian, Sharma, & Willich, 2008): 75% of Americans don't eat fruit and 64% don't eat vegetables; 70-90% of Germans ingest insufficient vitamin D, folic acid and even vitamin C; 50% of the people don't benefit from a healthy dose of vitamin E; 60% of elderly people and 74% teenagers don't get enough calcium from their food; 75% of the women in their fertility period have a significant iron deficit (Ogden, Carroll, Kit, & Flegal, 2012).

Thus only 10% of the European population is willing to adhere to a lifestyle that is considered healthy (Varo, Martínez-González, de Irala-Estévez, Kearney, Gibney, & Martínez, 2003). This lifestyle is based on a series of principles like removing the smoking habits, keeping the body mass index under 30, monitoring personal diets and evaluating nutritional values of bought, cooked and consumed food products.

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As for the natural food supplements, these were defined and regulated by law in the US Congress in 1994 (Hardy, 2000).

In Europe, according to the Directive (CEE) 2002/46 of the European Parliament and European Council, the term “food supplements” is defined by the food products that have the role to supplement the food diet and are concentrated sources of nutrients or other substances with physiological or nutritional effects (Roberfroid, 2000).

These substances can be found separately or in combinations and are marketed in dose forms as: capsules, pills, tablets and other similar forms, powder packs, liquid vials, dropper bottles and other similar forms destined for human consumption in small, measurable quantities. By knowing the biologically active substances contained in plants, can allow therapeutic value assessments so their action can be more efficient while used.

In the past year, a series of “myths” related to diets, nutrition and food supplements emerged from personal convictions and their understanding can be improved by bringing scientific proof based on empirical evidence (Casazza, Fontaine, Astrup, Birch, Brown, Bohan Brown... & McIver, 2013).

Diet and nutrition affects the overall aspect and the attitudes of an individual, which can reflect upon his physical and mental health state (Huang, Johnson, & Pipe, 2006). Food consumption should be controlled and adapted for each individual specific need. Regarding this matter, education and awareness on the eating act and food consumption behavior, sticking to a regular feeding schedule, choosing, alternating and combining the food correctly, identifying the state of hunger and the state of satiety, together with the chemistry and the alteration of nourishments through digestion, the environment where the food is consumed, the intolerances and allergies and the specific diets, are the elements of which the people should be aware for a healthy food style (Horgen, & Brownell, 2002). Considering these issues, we talk about a truly beneficial aspect related to human functioning, in which awareness and understanding are the mental ingredients required to maintain balanced behaviors.

From another point of view, the existence of dietary supplements, which represent concentrated sources of nutrients whose use is sometimes necessary in certain physiological states and at certain ages, either to prevent disease, either to increase the immunity or improving the appetite, the digestion, or certain physical or sexual performances represents a real alternative that should be considered (Gibson, 2005).

The myth embraced by some individuals is the one regarding the fact that if there are no health issues, no medical treatments are required. The perception that the food supplements are in fact pills (thus talking about a medical treatment) should be changed through proper psycho-educational means (Pillitteri, Shiffman, Rohay, Harkins, Burton, & Wadden, 2008).

Continuing the previous idea, we can say that currently there is no food supplement, which, on long-term, can replace a healthy food diet. The human body needs a whole range of macro and micro nutrients that can be provided only by a diverse and balanced diet (Barasi, 2003).

As the individual ages, the needs of the body are changing along with the speed of the metabolism in relation to the physical and mental activity (Physical activity and health: A report of the Surgeon General, 1996). All these changes require additional support through proper diet plans and activities according to the new necessities of the body. Thereby aging can be supported by a quality lifestyle and through a configuration of what we call “well-being” (Edgerton, 1990). The afflictions occur mostly when the body is imbalanced or vulnerable and not as a consequence of old age.

Finally we can conclude that nutrition is a major factor of the health status. The quality, type and quantities of the food consumed can prevent and slow the progression of disease or conversely, these may lead to the emergence or acceleration of disease progress.

The principles of a healthy diet are set by specialized guides and are a continuous concern for nutritionists and researchers in the field, in the effort to prevent nutritional imbalances and to decrease diseases linked to bad dietary behaviors.

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