

**EDITORIAL**

# The Role of Healthy Diet and Lifestyle in Preventing Chronic Diseases

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Non-communicable chronic diseases remain the leading cause of death worldwide, with approximately 38 million global deaths annually, according to the latest report released by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2017.<sup>1</sup> Half of these deaths can be prevented, according to WHO representatives, by taking urgent measures, including changing lifestyle and assimilating a healthy and balanced nutrition. Non-communicable chronic diseases represent the main factors responsible for 70% of planetary mortality.<sup>1</sup>

According to WHO reports of 2017, in Romania, 92% of all deaths were estimated to be caused by non-communicable chronic diseases, of which 56% were cardiovascular diseases, 20% cancers and 5% other chronic diseases, with a total risk of premature death of 21%, of which 29% were men and 12% were women aged 30–70 years.<sup>2</sup> Also in 2017, in Romania, the obesity rate was 25%, the sedentarism rate 38%, the alcohol consumption rate 13%, and the rate of excessive salt consumption 10%.<sup>2</sup>

In the face of this alarming situation, people have to understand that by adopting a healthy lifestyle with a proper diet every day, they can prevent diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease, lung disease, and cancer. People who visit an experienced dietitian and follow their recommendations about healthy eating, can have a better quality of life and decrease the risks of developing a non-communicable chronic disease.

The rapid expansion of evidence-based research and epidemiological studies over the past ten years has contributed to clarify the role of healthy eating and lifestyle in preventing and controlling premature morbidity and mortality caused by non-communicable diseases, as well as identifying food-specific components that increase the likelihood of these diseases to occur in individuals and to establish the appropriate interventions in order to modify their impact.<sup>3</sup>

In parallel with the acceleration of industrialization, urbanization, and economic development over the last decade, changes in eating patterns and lifestyle have also taken place, with a major impact on population health and nutrition, especially in developing or transition countries. Although the quality of life has

improved, food availability has expanded, diet has become more diversified, and access to services has increased, account must be taken of several significant negative effects, namely adopting poor eating habits, decreasing physical activity, and increasing tobacco consumption, which can significantly increase chronic diet-related illnesses.<sup>3</sup>

Food and food products have become commodities manufactured and commercialized in a market that has expanded from a key local base to an increasingly global market.<sup>3</sup> Changes in the world food economy have been reflected also in food habits. For example, there is a significantly higher consumption of foods with high fat content, especially saturated fats, food additives, increased amount of salt, and refined carbohydrates (sugar), these characteristics being combined with a sedentary lifestyle, all of which lead to the formation of a vicious circle and to changing attitudes and perceptions of individuals towards balanced nutrition and physical activity.

Given the alarming rates of obesity and chronic illness, now more than ever, strategies for promoting healthy lifestyles must be developed and the efforts of all those involved in the health system must be intensified in order to combat this epidemic.

A study published in this issue of JIM by Cînceanu *et al.* reported that women have a greater interest in healthy

eating than men. However, generally, there is a lack of knowledge about healthy eating, and also the perception and attitude towards healthy eating seems to be influenced by the key messages that are promoted through the main media channels (internet, radio, television).<sup>4</sup> This study underlines that the promotion of the dietitian's profession among the Romanian population can contribute to raising the level of information and education about preventing chronic disease through healthy eating and not only.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Nothing to declare.

## REFERENCES

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