

Eating and Sports Habits of University Students in Szeged

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Abstract

Aim. The Institute of Physical Education and Sports Sciences of the University of Szeged conducted an online survey on students studying at different university faculties. The main purpose of the study is to find out how health-conscious today's students are, what are their eating, fluid consumption and sports habits. **Methods.** In our descriptive basic research the mode of data collection is structured, largely standardized questionnaire that uses mostly colored questions and a Likert scale and the survey could be conducted online. The questionnaire was filled in by 746 people, 69.8% were women (521 persons) while 30.2% (225 persons) were men. **Results.** Their answers gave the following picture: 50% of the students are currently doing sports, most of them do it as a hobby and with friends. As a result of sport activities more than 50% of them changed their eating habits in a positive direction. Nearly 75% of students consider their eating habits healthy. They use different type of diets regularly. The majority eat more times a day and drink acceptable amount of water. The vegetable consumption is higher than fruit intake. Just every tenth students eat fast food every week. **Conclusion.** For the results mentioned above, it would be important for students to have courses in life-style or life coaching, because who do not know the connections between sports and nutrition do not feel their importance either. Implementing and organizing special programmes would also help to transform a young adult into a conscious and active adult.

Keywords

Higher education, nutrition, sport, fluid intake, physical activity

Introduction

As a common point of many definitions we are most responsible for our own health. This is greatly influenced by our behaviour, health behaviour, daily habits, that is the way we live. Everyone should be responsible for their own health as much as possible (Egészségügyi törvény, 1997). The chance of developing genetically inherited diseases is often determined by lifestyle factors, because lifestyle is a set of behavioral choices that strongly depend on the socio-economic circumstances of individuals and the availability of alternatives (Milio, 1981). This means that the person makes behavioral decisions about their lifestyle, but this decision significantly influenced by circumstances (culture, position in society) and personality (motivation, conflict and stress management) (Pikó, 2006). Thanks to the National Core Curriculum every day physical education has been introduced in ascending system since the school year 2012, so the right attitude can develop from a young age. At the same time it is well known that physical activity decreases with age in a gender-related way (mainly among girls) and this can be justified both among international and domestic (Pikó and Keresztes, 2007) young people. Keresztes, Szilágyi & Horváth (2014) conducted a research on similar topic as present study. It was concluded that although university students take part in leisure-time physical activity, only 38.6% of them do it once or twice a week. Koroknay and Pfau (2019) examined whether there is a detectable difference in the awareness of non-sport students and sport students in their sporting habits. This primary research has shown that students are recognized the benefits of sport and it is seen as a means of preserving health. In the study of the physical activity of university students (Vári, Sajben & Pálhidai, 2019) it was founded that students perceive their fitness as much worse than their health. According to a university survey (Papp-Váry, Schwang, 2012) the lifestyle and consumer habits of them were also examined. They surveyed whether students are conscious consumers, are they satisfied with their body weight, how often they are dieting, and what is typical of their nutrition. In general, students in higher educa-

tion tend to take into account what others think about them, important to be member of a group and relationship with their friends. During these years they are going through a varying degrees and very dynamic process of physical, intellectual, emotional and social development. Harmful passions can develop, and being away from home or becoming independent is also an influencing factor. The daily routine, the short breaks between classes, and the hard study and exam periods also affect the regular eating and physical activity. A survey (Hámori, Horváth, 2018) examined at how much the students work during their studies. The number of young people working regularly reached one third. This is very important because the amount of leisure time is reducing also the time available for sports.

Our research focused on young adults who are able to choose their own lifestyle and can do to live a longer and healthier life. This is only a small part of the whole study which investigated the lifestyles of student studying at different university faculties, with particular regard to eating habits and the impact of sports activities on the body. The main purpose of the study is to find out how health-conscious today's students are, how they eat, exercise, how physical activity affects them, and how they integrate them into their daily lives. Our questions focused on the following: Do students consider sport as part of their lifestyle? How much sports they did in the last period and how much time are they spending on a weekly basis? What is the reason for doing or not doing sports? What are the most common sport activities that entertain college students? In what kind of framework do they exercise? How does sport affect their performance and nutrition? Do they control the changes of body weight? Are they dieting regularly? How many vegetables and fruits do they consume daily? How many meals do they have a day and which is the main meal? Does the breakfast appear in their daily activities? How much fluid do they consume daily and what does it consist of? How much do college students go to fast food restaurants?

Methods

In our descriptive basic research the mode of data collection is structured, largely standardized questionnaire that uses mostly closed questions and a Likert scale. The surveyed group had almost all online access, so the survey could be conducted online. The respondents could complete the questionnaire online at docs.google.com online questionnaire editor page from May 17 th, 2018 to 10th of July, 2018. We targeted different university groups, student communities, faculty administrators, and faculty members to help our work. The students shared the questionnaire with each other through various university user interfaces (Coospace, Neptun) and other community sites. During the indicated period, 746 respondents completed the questionnaire. The number of elements is high, generalizability extends to students studying in Szeged. Excel spreadsheet was used to record data. We used it as an analysis method: frequency analysis, distribution analysis. Each respondents are student of the faculties of the University of Szeged. The majority of the respondents 69.8% were women (521 persons) while 30.2% (225 persons) were men. The average age is 22.4 years, the youngest student is 18 years old and the oldest student is 51 years old. The distribution between the faculties was the following: Faculty of Sciences (18.1%), Faculty of Economic Sciences (17.3%), Faculty of Law (14.6%), Faculty of Health Sciences (10.7%), Faculty of Humanities (10.4%), Faculty of Education (14.2%), Faculty of Medicine (6%) Faculty of Agriculture (5.4%). Fills were also received from the remaining 4 faculties but not in significant proportion. 79.1% of the respondents live in Szeged during the study term, while only 56.4% in the exam period. In addition their studies 48.2% of them are not working, 27.3% occasionally and 24.5% regularly. These results also influence the time spent on sports.

Results

Sports habits

Examining sports habits, firstly we were curious about whether how many of the surveyed believe that sports should be part of

their lifestyle. 92% of men and 94% of women answered yes to this question. In spite of the high rate of yes answers, only 20% of respondents achieved the recommended minimum three or more sports activities over the past 3 months. This represent 24% for men and 16% of women. This rate is 20%-15% for the men with the answer 2-3 times a week. We received 18%-28% with the answer 1-2 times a week. Over the past 3 months, 13% of the responding men and 11% of the women have never exercised. Currently regularly claims to be an athlete the 55% of men and 49% of women, so 52% on average. In the case of non-athletes, the following reasons were given for leaving sports (Figure 1)

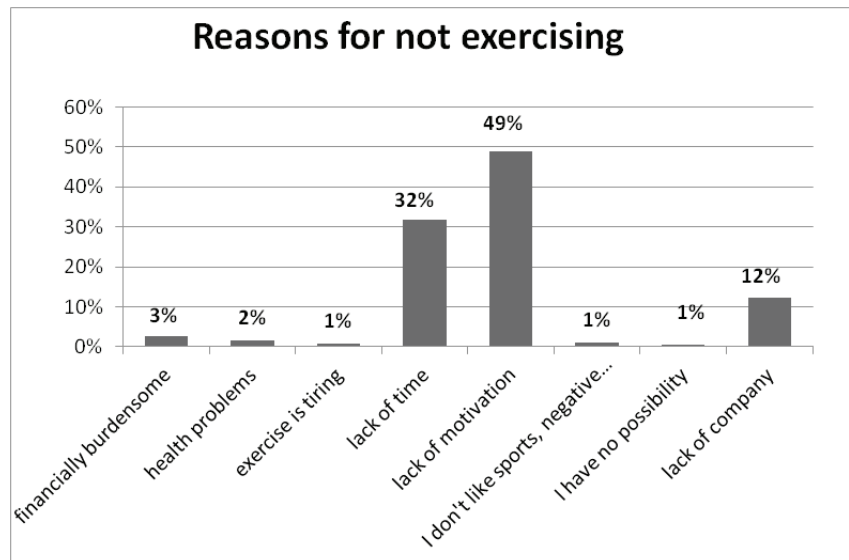


Figure 1 – Reasons for not exercising.

Lack of time and motivation is the major problem for university students. Due to the strength of sport in social relations, only 12% refers to the lack of company. The answers of those who exercise regularly show a much more interesting picture (Figure 2).

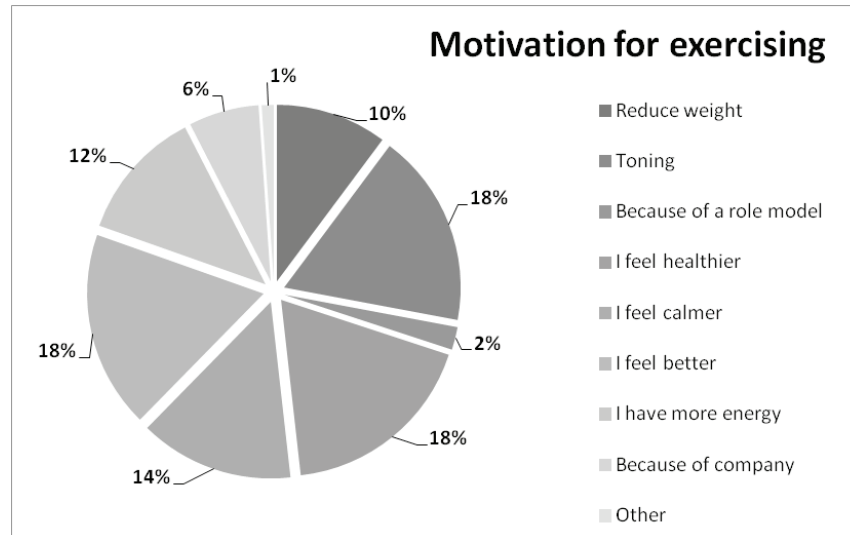


Figure 2. – Motivation for exercising.

As can be assumed, other rankings can be set between men's and women's responses. While the order of the men is (1.) feeling better, (2.) feeling healthier, (3-4.) toning and feeling calmer, (5.) having more energy, (6) losing weight, because of company, whereas for women this is different. For them the most important is (1.) toning, followed by (2-3-4.) feel healthier, feel better, feel calmer, (5.) more energy and finally the eight loss and company answers. We also tried to collect the possible sports activities, as it is very important that a young people wants to play a team or individual sport. Women mainly prefer individual sports (gymnastics, yoga 15%, gym workout 13%, running 12%, cycling 12%, fitness courses 10%), which does not mean that they are going alone for trainings. Men prefers endurance sports and ball games (gym workout 24%, cycling 12%, ball games 14%, running 12%). 44% of respondents sports with friends without any formal background or organized framework, 41% of them take part in sports alone (36% male, 43% female) and the remaining 16% in an association with an organized background.

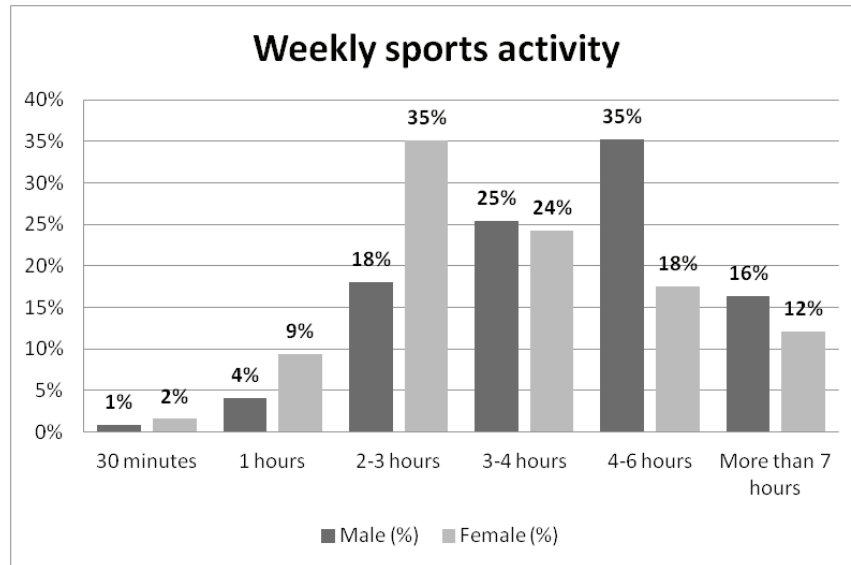


Figure 3 – Weekly sport activity.

Among the students surveyed, women spend less time exercising weekly on average (Fig.3).

Sport effect

It is important to examine the impact of sport on body (Figure 4), since knowing the good and bad is easier to make a decision that can greatly influence your lifestyle. Thanks to the physical and mental refreshing effects of sport, most have already experienced the ability to focus more or longer on a particular thing after a sport activity. Anyone who invests energy in shaping the body, improving their endurance, well-being through sport, it is natural for them to pay more attention to the diet and to consume and buy quality food consciously. Better appetite and higher fluid intake are natural part of physical activity, so it is not surprising that there is a high percentage of people who answered yes.

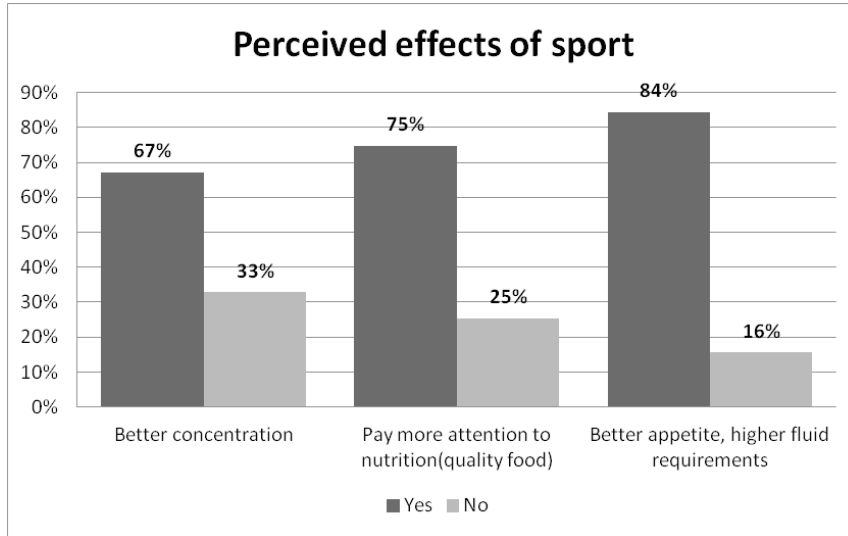


Figure 4 – Perceived effects of sport.

Eating habits

In terms of self-evaluation it is very important how we evaluate our eating habits. On the five point Likert scale, men and women showed nearly the same results. Men scored 3.1 on average, while women rated 3.3 on average on the healthiness of their diet. 4% of them are eating unhealthy and 6% are completely healthily. Scores of 3 and 4 were given almost the same rating (35% and 39%). Nutrition and body weight change are highly correlated, so we addressed this in our study. The values in Table 1 illustrate the relationship between body weight monitoring and diet frequency.

Table 1 Monitoring of weight changes and dieting habits

Monitoring of weight changes			Dieting habits		
Frequency	Male	Female	Frequency	Male	Female
every day	5%	7%	always	4%	7%
weekly	32%	25%	quite often	4%	7%
monthly	19%	19%	occasionally	11%	20%
occasionally	31%	38%	rarely	15%	19%
never	13%	11%	never	67%	47%

The gender difference is manifested by the fact that the majority of men check their body weight on weekly basis, while women only check it occasionally. More women diet than men and the reasons can be a New Year's vow, the beach season, and a big event.

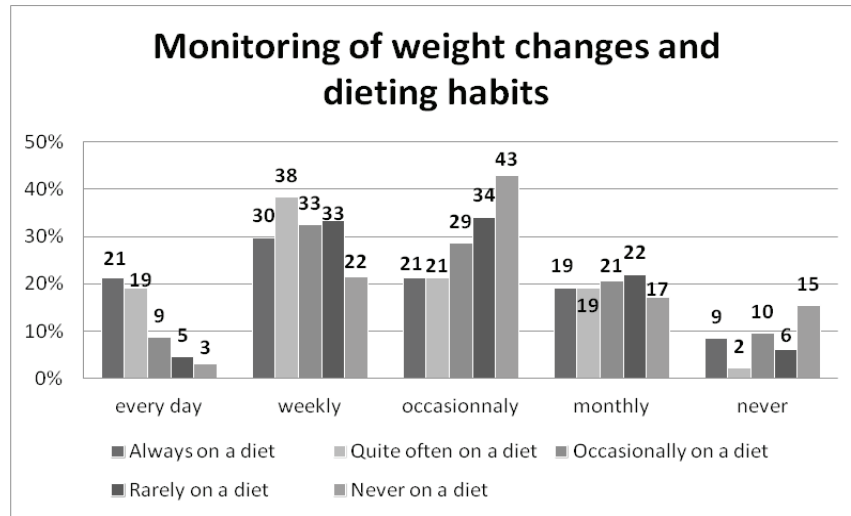


Figure 5 – Monitoring of weight changes and dieting habits.

We compared (Figure 5) how often they control their weight and how often do diet. Those who check the every day answer, can react immediately to the smallest change, so it is not surprising that most of them indicated the „always on a diet „answer. In a separate question, we asked if they were following a special diet and if so, for what reason. These include the diet of different sensitivities as well as vegetarianism, paleo, vegan diet. 12% of men and 21% of women answered yes. The majority of them (59% of men and 46% of women) use special diets due to changes body composition, the health reason is the next highest response rate (41% of women and 17% of men). A very important question from early childhood is how much vegetables and fruits we consume. Their intake into the body is important for the amount of fiber ingested and because of their high vitamin content. Many diets are based on these ingredients. In answering this question, not only fresh but also frozen and canned vegetables and fruits were included.

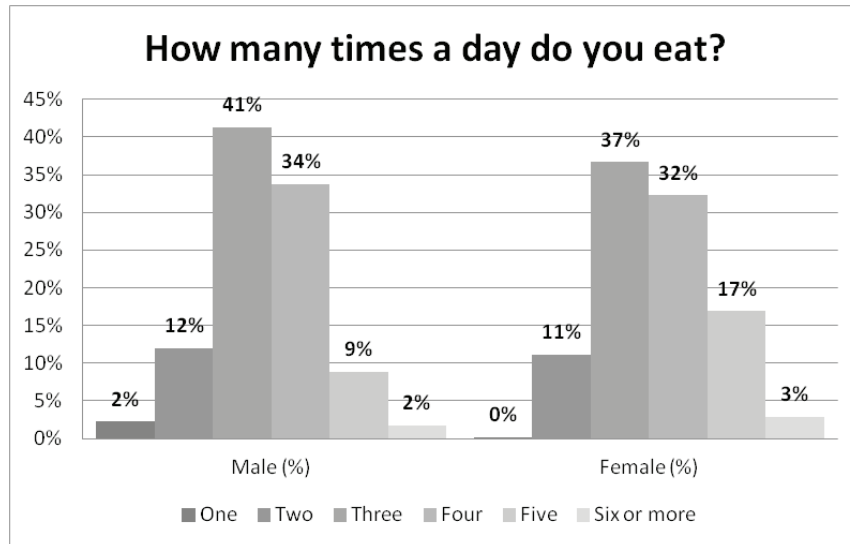


Figure 6 – Vegetable and fruit consumption.

Table 6 summarizes the results, but we also looked at the issue by gender. The daily intake of vegetables (52%) and the fruit (48%) is higher for women than for men. Most men do not consume such foods, just on a weekly basis (41% vegetable and 51% fruit consumption). 7% of men and 9% of women eat vegetables several times a day. Fruit consumption was lower, as only 3% of men and 7% of women ate fruit several times a day. The „I don't eat vegetables" answer were selected by 4% of men and 2% of women. In terms of fruit consumption the result was 2-2%.

The number of times we eat a day is greatly influenced by our work, studies, free time, finances and other options.

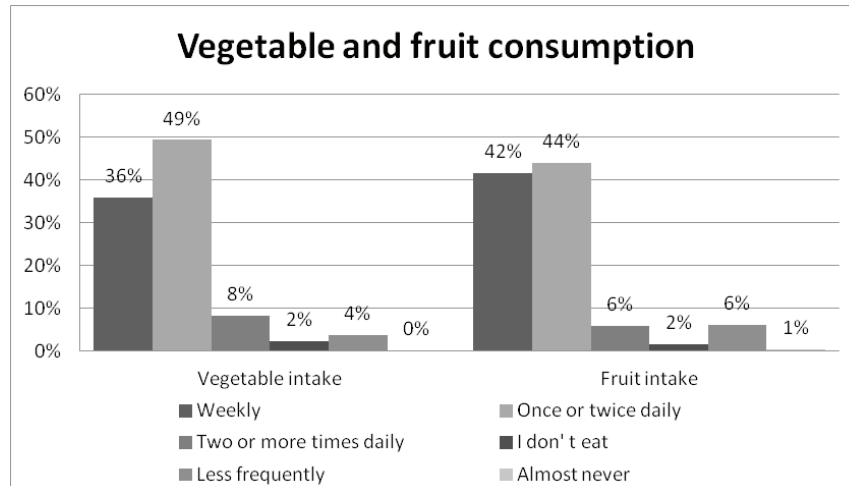


Figure 7 – How many times a day do you eat?

There is no big difference between men and women (Figure 7), but it is noticeable that many women already eat five times a day, probably based on the „more time, less food” principle. The answers also revealed that nearly half of the students (47% of men, 55% of women) had breakfast every day, which is considered the most important meal of the day. 21% of men skip breakfast 2-3 times a week and 19% of them 4-5 times. Women are only a little more conscious because based on their results we see that 18% of them skip breakfast 2-3 times and 16% 4-5 times a week. 6% of men and 7% of women never have breakfast. According to Hungarian traditions, the main meal is lunch, which is usually a hot meal, and 73% of men and 72% of women consider lunch to be their main meal. Of course it is also possible to consume it over a very wide time, as the lunch areas are open from 11 am to 3 pm. Probably family people (22% of men and women) are those for whom a common dinner is the main meal. „Have breakfast like a king, have lunch as a rich one, and have dinner as a poor” principle was followed by those, who marked the breakfast as the main meal (5% of men and 6% of women). Because of their tight schedule, many people choose fast food restaurants as their dining destination. Our question was how many people go to fast food restaurants at least 2-3 times a

week. Our summary shows that 17% of men and 9% of women. In the next set of questions we asked the average amount of fluid taken daily. There are several formulas for the recommended daily amount, but the most influential factor is whether the person is older or younger, possibly a child, live a passive or active life, do a sedentary work, spend a lot of time indoor or outdoor, and the time of day or the season also influencing factors. Many people are not aware that the daily intake of fluid includes the water content of the food they eat. The following figure (Figure 8) shows the the response rate to the question.

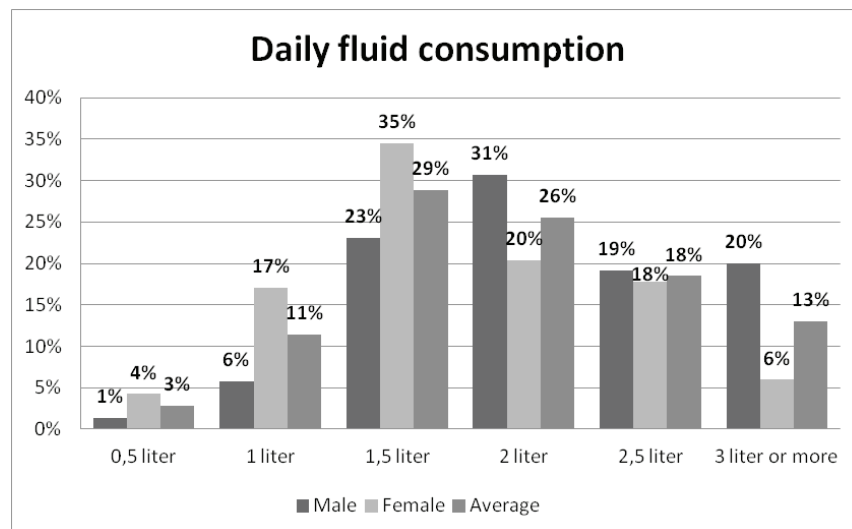


Figure 8 – Daily Fluid Consumption.

Women achieved higher rate below 1.5 liters, while men achieved all values above this. Most men surveyed consume more than 2 liters of fluid per day. There were 3 categories of fluid quality. The following results were obtained.

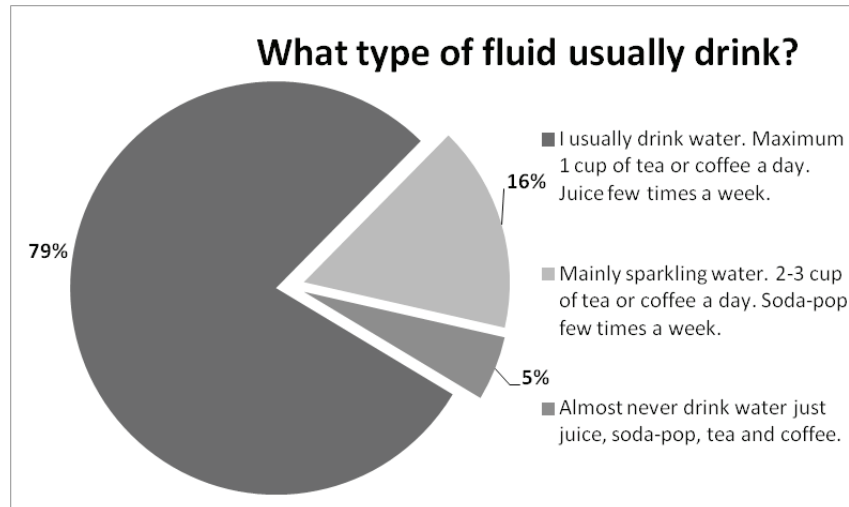


Figure 9 –What type of fluid do you usually drink?

The vast majority (Figure 9) usually drink water and only minimal amounts of other types of liquids such as tea, coffee, soda-pop or juice. There is no big difference between men's and women's responses. All three categories were chosen in almost equal rate. We have examined the consumption of energy drink, which can be mentioned as a harmful passion, in another survey.

Discussion

Koroknay and Pfau (2019) finding that university students are aware of the benefits of sport, and this result is the same as what we get, so the vast majority of students consider physical activity an important part of their lifestyle. Even though they have experienced on their own skin that they are changing their eating habit in a positive way and helping to reduce the everyday stress, many people spend only 1-2 times a week with sport. Pikó and Keresztes found that the level of physical activity decreases with age and has been proved here. In the survey of Keresztes és mtsai. (2014) and Papp-Váry and Schwang (2012) have similarly low results as ours.

Although young people are taking part in sports, their physical activity is below recommended levels. We know that sport plays a very important role in social relationships, so it is also important what students do, with whom, and with what background. The difference between women and men of course apparent, because the types of exercise that women prefer are carried out in groups so that one cannot be alone if they want to. Men prefer the individual sports and ball games and spend more time exercising weekly. University students consider a wide range of aspects when deciding on sport activities. There are several reasons why people don't regret money and time for physical and mental health. In our world where externality is very important, it is surprising that the most important reason is to be healthy and feel better by sport. Of course weight loss and toning also appear, but not among the most important reasons. For those who do not exercise the main reason is lack of motivation and lack of time. The lack of time is perhaps still acceptable as most students work besides their study, however finding no outside or inside motivation for a young person to play sports is almost unacceptable. Many people check their body weight regularly and although we have not asked whether they are satisfied with it, the majority is presumably not. Many people use some form of diet on a regular and occasional basis. Nutrition is an essential part of body weight control, which is probably the main reason for the high consumption of vegetables and fruits. It would be easier to eat an apple, banana or some kind of seasonal fruit daily, but nevertheless the consumption of vegetables is higher. According to student feedback, more than 80% of them have got possibility to eat more than 3 meals a day and for most lunch is the main course. The importance of breakfast is also proved by the fact that, despite the early hours it is important for many to start the day with breakfast. A lot of information comes to us about how much and what kind of fluid we should drink. Proper amount of coffee and tea can solve many health problems but too much is harmful. Unfortunately, sugary drinks are not the most recommended category, but they are still popular, especially with fast food. Rushing lifestyle makes eating in fast-food restaurants unavoidable, but it's not the most typical.

Conclusion

Our research was good to see in which field need to develop or guide the students of the University of Szeged. All in all the question is the glass full or half empty? Can we be satisfied with the results presented or not? Half of the students take part in a variety of sports. Of course the time allotted for this may not reach the recommended amount for everyone, but this may vary. The benefits of sport are known and recognized, but nearly half of them do not exercise because of many reasons. Because of the large number of dieters, most people try to change their lifestyle in a positive way by changing their nutrition. Almost half of interviewed are able to have breakfast in relaxed environment and eat fruit and vegetables regularly. Higher levels of sporting activity are likely to result in more fluid intake, which would result in an important change. For the reasons mentioned above, it would be important for students to have courses in lifestyle or life coaching, because who do not know the connections between sports and nutrition do not feel their importance either. Implementing and organizing special programmes would also help to transform a young adult into a conscious and active adult.

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