

For Immediate Release



AUB symposium on nutrition and exercise warns against salt fluoridation, promotes exercise

Beirut, Lebanon- 08/12/2014 - Instead of adding fluoride to salt, health policymakers should promote proper oral hygiene in order to prevent caries, said an AUB nutrition and dietetics expert during a symposium on nutrition and exercise for health, organized by the Department of Nutrition and Food Sciences at the AUB Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences (FAFS).

Nutrition and Dietetics Professor Omar Obeid warned that although fluoride plays a protective role against dental caries, its ingestion may cause dental fluorosis and may be associated with decreased intelligence scores, diminished brain development and fragile bones.

Obeid shared his research on fluoride levels in 6-10 year old schoolchildren during a symposium held by the department on December 2 on campus, in collaboration with the Lebanese Academy for Nutrition and Dietetics (LAND) and with the support of the Coca-Cola Foundation. The symposium was attended by nutritionists, dietitians, health professionals and members of the medical community.

Even though baseline fluoride intake is considered to be lower than the adequate intake (0.4 mg mean intake in 6-10 year old children versus 1 mg of adequate intake), this does not mean that Lebanon should embark on salt fluoridation because, noted Obeid, because fluoride is most effective topically, and only with proper oral hygiene practices, in order to prevent dental caries. “In other words, it is unnecessary to add it to food, such as the proposed salt fluoridation,” he said.

By way of example, Obeid explained that drinking 1 cup of tea per day will provide 0.5 mg/day of fluoride and brushing teeth 1 time per day will provide 0.25 mg/day.

Therefore, adequate intake of 1 mg of fluoride can be easily reached. More importantly, with higher levels of tea consumption and teeth brushing, fluoride intake might reach the upper limit (2.2 mg/day) that should not be exceeded, he added.

During the symposium, leading local and international nutrition and physical activity experts and researchers shed the light on emerging issues in the fields of nutrition, food security and exercise in relation to optimal health and as a prevention strategy against chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular disease.

Professor Nahla Hwalla, FAFS dean and president of the Lebanese Academy for Nutrition and Dietetics in Lebanon, said, “The main objective of this symposium is to stress that nutrition and exercise should be the focus of attention of countries of the region as recent studies and statistics show that the Middle East has one of the highest burdens of non-communicable diseases in the world.”

Farah Naja, assistant professor at the nutrition department, emphasized the association of food insecurity with suboptimal nutrition status and increased risk of non-communicable diseases, underscoring the need to develop and validate tools to measure food security in countries of the region. Naja presented data stemming from a recent research project conducted by the nutrition and food science department (AUB) on food security status amongst young children from the Beqaa area in Lebanon. According to Naja, the association between food security and the uprisings in many countries of the MENA region should be enough incentive to tailor specific interventions to high risk population groups and develop efficient evaluation systems of national food policies. In many countries of this region, the scarcity of such interventions and policies is attributed in part to the lack of culture-specific tools to assess food insecurity. Recent research at the NFSC department showed an alarming rate of food insecurity in rural Lebanon, as more than 50 percent of households suffer from some form of food insecurity.

Children belonging to households with higher food insecurity levels were more likely to be stunted, while experiencing lower dietary diversity and meal frequency. On the other hand, food insecurity led to a higher rate of obesity among mothers. These results serve as basis for future research aimed at assessing national prevalence of food insecurity.

Dr. Robert Sallis, clinical professor of family medicine at the University of California Riverside School of Medicine and co-director of sports medicine at Kaiser Permanente Medical Center in the United States, highlighted the role of exercise as a powerful tool for both the treatment and prevention of chronic disease; mitigating the harmful effects of obesity; and lowering mortality rates.

As for Jean-Michel Borys, director of the European Network EPODE (*Ensemble Prévenons l'Obésité Des Enfants or Together Let's Prevent Childhood Obesity*), he highlighted that childhood obesity is a complex issue that needs a multi-stakeholder involvement at all levels to foster healthier lifestyles in a sustainable way as it has been demonstrated through community based programs.

The symposium provided evidence for the importance of diet and lifestyle in ensuring optimal health and reducing the risk for chronic diseases in a region that is plagued by one of the highest rates of obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases.

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Note to Editors

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Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 700 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,000 students. AUB currently offers more than 100 programs leading to the bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full service 420-bed hospital.

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