OKkio alla SALUTE:
an Italian project to assess childhood obesity and promote health literacy

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Zurich, November 12th - 13th 2012
In a health improving context, it is important to encourage people to ask questions and be able to understand the answers:

What is my main problem?
What do I need to do?
Why is it important for me to do this?
How can I follow a healthy lifestyle?

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In 2007 the Italian Ministry of Health started a national nutritional surveillance system, OKkio alla SALUTE for specific target groups: children, parents, teachers, pediatricians...

This is coordinated by our Institute and is part of the WHO/Europe project: *Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative (COSI).*
Obesity in Young Children

- The impact of obesity particularly concerns younger children.
- Over 26% of preschool children are overweight or obese.
- Furthermore, the prevalence of obesity in this age group continues to increase every year.
Obesity in Young Children

- Innovative approaches to obesity prevention during early childhood are critically needed.

- Addressing literacy and numeracy through improved healthcare provider communication skills and improved educational materials, both in print and online, is a potentially successful strategy.
It is essential to prepare and carry out an in-depth scientific survey (description, objectives, methods, participants…).

Careful study of survey results is necessary to promote appropriate kinds of health literacy dissemination.
Objectives of the project

➢ To estimate the prevalence of childhood overweight and obesity among Italian children of primary school age.

➢ To examine the main risk factors (*nutrition, physical activity, sedentary pastimes*) thus promoting a healthy style of life.

➢ To realize print and online information in order to improve health literacy in child education.
Methods 1/1

- **Study population**: Children of school grade 3 (8-9 years old)

The choice of this particular age was based on biological (the nutritional aspect is little affected by puberty) and cognitive development aspects (children are able to answer simple questions more precisely).
Methods 1/2

- **Sampling**: Cluster sampling (survey method in which groups or cluster of sampling units, and not individual units, are selected from a population for analysis in all the Italian regions) was made on grade 3 primary-school classes. A representative sample was taken from each region.
Methods 1/3

- **Data collection:** Parents, children and teachers were asked to complete short anonymous questionnaires to discover and analyze children’s behavioural risk factors.

- Children were weighed and their body mass index was calculated according to the *International Obesity Task Force* that establishes overweight and obesity.

- All data collected was entered into a special database for analysis by health professionals.

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Participants to *OKkio alla SALUTE*

Biennial (2008-2010) data collection involved about:

- **classes:** 2,500
- **children:** 44,000
- **parents:** 45,000
- **teachers:** 2,300

Response rate: 97%

The third data collection is currently in progress…

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Evaluation

Overweight and obesity by region in children 8-9 years old
Italy 2010

The Campania Region

Bozen 15%

Milan

49%

7 different degrees of overweight

ITALY

Overweight
2010: 23.0%
2008: 23.6%

Obese
2010: 11.2%
2008: 12.3%

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Children spending more than two hours a day playing video games or watching TV

A geographical element is clearly involved

The Campania Region 54%
Bozen 15%
Milan

Percentage of children with more than 2 hours a day

≤ 27%
> 27% and ≤ 38%
> 38%

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Bad eating habits of Italian children in school before and after the training campaigns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sandwiches</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit juice</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crackers</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweet snacks</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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How a clear communication on health information and services will help create and promote health literacy
Documentation
print and online information for...

- **children**: interactive educational devices, to be used in the classroom, multimedia kits on CD (with user manuals for teachers), didactic cartoons, educational toys.

- **parents**: guidelines for a healthy Italian diet, a new food pyramid, recipes with fruit and vegetables to be prepared with their children.

- **teachers**: print recommendations for a correct diet with fruit and vegetables to be consumed during break, educational material...

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Documentation
print and online information for...

- **teachers and families**: meetings with the support of health workers to inform on proper nutrition and promote physical activity.

- **pediatricians**: information courses, based on medical advice, to promote the correct diet necessary for maintaining a healthy weight and at the same time enjoying physical exercise.

- **health personnel**: data collection and data analysis.

- **all**: printed brochures, online information, information boards, posters, advertising, slogans…

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Examples of educational print materials for children, parents, teachers, pediatricians...
Examples of educational online materials...

*Bad eating habits and bad advertising*

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Examples of educational online materials…

*Fruit in schools - TV spot 2012*

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Conclusions

- Although in Italy the **prevalence of obesity, bad diet and lack of regular exercise** is high, in the North it is lower.

- Between 2008 and 2010 we observed a **slight decrease in overweight and obesity** and some changes in risk factors.

Waiting for the 2012 results, we can say that...

**printed and online information has played an active and impressive role in promoting and improving health literacy within each group studied.**
Thank you!

For more information:

https://www.okkioallasalute.it/
http://www.epicentro.iss.it/okkioallasalute/

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