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Consumer attitudes to physical activity, body weight and health among EU populations

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Keywords

physical activity, obesity, consumer attitudes, bodyweight

Objectives: In most developed countries, the rise in obesity in recent years has been paralleled by rising levels of physical inactivity. A limiting factor to the promotion of physical activity in relation to health has been a knowledge of consumer attitudes and beliefs about physical activity and body-weight. The objectives of the pan-EU survey were to assess: attitudes and beliefs about physical activity, body-weight and health, current levels of activity / inactivity (self-reported), and prevailing levels of over-weight and obesity.

Methods: A cross-sectional study in which quota-controlled, nationally representative samples of approximately 1,000 adults from each country completed a face-to-face interview-assisted questionnaire. The survey was conducted in the 15 member states of the European Union between march and April 1997.

Results: Physical activity was not perceived to be among the top three priorities having the greatest influence on overall health in the EU. Smoking, food and stress were perceived to be more important.

Those selecting physical activity were less likely to select stress as a factor important for health. Wide interstate variation was seen for the selection of physical activity ranging from 9% in Italy to 44% in Finland.

Conclusions: Such wide interstate variation in attitudes and beliefs towards physical activity has implications for programmes being developed to promote physical activity across the EU.