

Mass media and health: Well-informed people eat better

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It is time to leave apart the belief that mass media are always a source of bad habits. Television, newspaper and the Internet, when used to get information, may turn out to be of help for health.

It is the conclusion of a study conducted by the Research Laboratories at the Fondazione di Ricerca e Cura "Giovanni Paolo II" in Campobasso which analyzed data from a sample of more than 1,000 people from the largest Moli-sani Project, the [epidemiological study](#) that recruited 25,000 subjects in Molise, a southern region of Italy.

The report, published on line in the *International Journal of Public Health*, is one of the first research considering the [mass media](#) information as a whole by taking into account the sources of information most used by people to get informed on several issues. So far scientists analyzed just the effects of [television viewing](#) on health, coming to negative conclusions.

"Scientific literature has mainly focused on television viewing, considered a risk factor for health mainly because it represents a measure of [physical inactivity](#) – says Marialaura Bonaccio, first author of the study and member of the Science communication unit at the Research Laboratories – Basically, watching TV is often linked to physical inactivity and snacking, with negative effects on obesity, a major cardiovascular risk factor. In our study we paid attention to the capacity of people to get informed by using mass media, including the Internet and newspapers or magazines. We sought to see whether most

informed people had better eating habits than those less exposed to information".

Researchers from Campobasso conducted their study (called Moli-news) on more than 1,000 adult subjects randomly recruited from the general population. who participated to the epidemiological study Moli-sani. In addition to different information collected for the main project (medical information, lifestyle, dietary habits, etc) the participants to Moli-news also completed a specific questionnaire on mass media usage, from TV viewing to newspaper and magazine reading and surfing the Internet. Researchers had in the meantime created a score of mass media information exposure.

"Exposition to several media - explains Americo Bonanni, head of the Science communication unit of the Research Laboratories – has then been associated to lifestyle. We focused on eating habits, mainly on Mediterranean diet. Results have shown that people most exposed to information delivered by any mass media source, reported higher adherence to the Mediterranean-like eating patterns. The latter are considered as the most effective eating model for reducing the risk of chronic and neurodegenerative diseases. In particular, people resulting more informed reported higher consumption of some key foods of the Mediterranean diet pyramid, such as fruits and fresh fish, and a lower consumption of less healthy food such as animal fats".

"Information delivered by mass media – claims Giovanni de Gaetano director of the Research Laboratories – may appear fragmented or imprecise, especially when we talk about health and prevention. Our study has however provided data which may turn out to be very useful in a period in which to combat obesity increase, unhealthy dietary habits and diffused laziness we are urged to find new ways to communicate health. We should stop being suspicious of mass media. The next step will be to evaluate the single sources of information and to study the

changes that the internet is introducing in the way people, mainly the youngest, get informed on [health](#) topics".

The Moli-sani Project is conducted by the Research Laboratories of the Fondazione di Ricerca e Cura "Giovanni Paolo II" in Campobasso, Italy. Started in March 2005, the study has recruited 25,000 citizens living in the Molise region, in order to investigate environmental and genetic factors responsible for cardiovascular disease and tumors. The Moli-sani study is changing the face of a whole Italian region by turning it into a large scientific laboratory.

Provided by Catholic University - Campobasso

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