

Europeans do not consume enough vitamins and minerals

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Credit: SINC

A study has analysed intake of 17 basic micronutrients in people's diets across eight European countries. The results reveal that, although vitamin D is the most extreme case, European citizens - across all age and sex ranges - do not consume sufficient iron, calcium, zinc, vitamin B1 (thiamine), vitamin B2 (riboflavin), vitamin B6 and folic acid.

A group of researchers from the International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI Europe) has evaluated the low intake of 17 micronutrients in eight European countries: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, the United Kingdom and Spain.

"Better understanding the scope of [micronutrient](#) adequacy across Europe is a significant challenge," explain the authors of the study, which was published this year in the *British Journal of Nutrition*.

The experts believe that, despite the fact that current European policies on nutrition focus fundamentally on tackling problems to do with excessive consumption, not much is known across the continent about the optimal intake of micronutrients.

According to the authors, despite its limited data, this study provides "valuable information on micronutrient intake in Europe and the likelihood of its inadequacy country by country."

The study, which compares the latest data from dietary surveys representing the various territories, shows that, of the 17 compounds analysed, there is a great prevalence of 'improvable' intakes of various micronutrients, especially iron, calcium, zinc, vitamin B1 (thiamine), vitamin B2 (riboflavin), vitamin B6, vitamin D and [folic acid](#).

"In the case of vitamins, low levels of consumption in all age and sex groups do not pose a risk except in the case of vitamin D," the experts continue. However, for minerals, the risk of inadequate intake is larger in certain groups depending on age.

"To our knowledge, this is the first time micronutrient consumption has been evaluated across several countries. Thus, it provides a better vision of micronutrient inadequacy in Europe and is a valuable resource for assessing the state of populations," they conclude.

Micronutrients in the Spanish diet

According to data from the National Survey on Dietary Intake conducted recently by the Spanish Agency for Food Safety and Nutrition (AESAN), the case of Spain is particular.

From all the values analysed we can conclude that average micronutrient consumption exceeds 80% of the reference dietary intakes, except in the case of zinc, iron in women of childbearing age, vitamin A, [vitamin D](#) and folic acid, in which inadequate intake can be observed.

The AESAN survey concludes: "The modern Spanish diet is a western-type diet, further and further removed from typical Mediterranean cuisine, although this gap is lower than might be expected due to the population's high consumption of fish."

As such, the data show very low intakes of vegetables, fruits and their derivatives, low consumption of cereals, mainly refined, and high intake of meats and their derivatives and products prepared with high sodium, fat and added sugar content.

More information: Mensink G.B.M. et al. Mapping low intake of micronutrients across Europe, *British Journal of Nutrition* 2013; 14:1-19.

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