

# The Swiss diet under the microscope

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Quality of nutrition and diet is influenced by the consumer's financial resources, reveals a study funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation. Some immigrants have a healthier diet than people born in Switzerland.

People with a higher level of education have dietary habits that are closest to the Mediterranean diet, which helps to prevent cardiovascular disease, diabetes and obesity. This is the conclusion of the study – the first of its kind in Switzerland – conducted by Pedro Marques-Vidal and his team at the CHUV (Centre Hospitalier universitaire Vaudois, Lausanne University Hospital).

The dietary habits of more than 4,000 inhabitants of Lausanne were evaluated in respect of three criteria. The first corresponds to the Greek Mediterranean diet, based on cereals, vegetables, fruit and fish. The second is a variant that includes dairy products, in order to reflect the habits of Swiss consumers. The third is an index of healthy diets, the "Alternative Healthy Eating Index", which is used in the USA to evaluate the quality of nutrition of people with low incomes.

## **Lifestyle and country of origin**

The study, forming part of the National Research Programme "Healthy Nutrition and Sustainable Food Production" (NRP 69), has found that the lifestyle of participants in the study influences their dietary behaviour. Those who are overweight, as well as smokers and people who lead sedentary lifestyles often eat less healthily. In contrast, older participants and those living together as a couple pay greater attention to the quality of their food.

Participants' country of origin has also been revealed as a factor. "Despite occupying a relatively low socio-economic level, residents from Italy, Portugal and Spain have retained their Mediterranean [dietary habits](#) and eat more healthily than people born in France and Switzerland," explains Pedro Marques-Vidal.

## **Action on prices**

Other studies had demonstrated that less well-off consumers reduce the amount of healthy food they buy in favour of less expensive foodstuffs, which often provide lower nutritional quality. A higher level of education generally corresponds with more comfortable income levels, which allow consumers to buy more healthy foods.

According to research conducted in New Zealand and Australia, cutting prices is more effective in encouraging the purchase of fruit and vegetables than educational measures. According to Pedro Marques-Vidal, "special offers for fruit and vegetables that are reaching their sell-by date would be an example of a measure that could encourage changes in dietary behaviour."

**More information:** "Sociodemographic and Behavioural Determinants of a Healthy Diet in Switzerland." *Annals of Nutrition and Metabolism* online: [DOI: 10.1159/000437393](https://doi.org/10.1159/000437393)

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