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Television viewing is associated to obesity in Portuguese school children

Topic: B4. Pediatrics

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Introduction: Childhood obesity has become a serious public health problem. At the same time, children face environmental and lifestyle challenges that have made high energy-dense micronutrient-poor foods increasingly available and the development of physical inactivity because of television viewing. The objective of our study was to assess the links between childhood obesity and television viewing in a nationally representative sample of Portuguese school children.

Material and Methods: The study was performed in a random sample of 7-9-y-old Portuguese school children. A total of 4297 were included (2184 girls and 2113 boys). The response rate was 70.6%. Height and weight were measured according international standards, and body mass index was calculated. The definitions of overweight and obesity were based on average centiles according International Obesity Task Force cut-offs. Childrens' parents completed a self-administered questionnaire that provided information on general family background characteristics, and children's physical activity (sports, computer and video game use, TV/video watching, and time spending in reading and studying during weekdays and weekends). Children's dietary intake was measured using a 24-h dietary recall. Logistic regression models were fitted to estimate the magnitude of the association between overweight/obesity and television viewing, adjusting for confounders (age, energy intake, calcium/protein intake, parental education and physical activity).

Results: In girls, the odds favouring overweight/obesity increased significantly for those viewing television/video during Saturdays, for ≥ 1 h/day, compared to those with < 1 h. In boys, the odds favouring overweight/obesity increased significantly with television/video during weekdays, for ≥ 2 h/day, compared to those with < 1 h.

Discussion: Television viewing influenced overweight/obesity in a more pronounced way than any other environmental variable. Prevention of obesity in Portuguese children should consider the need to limit television viewing.

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