

Fostering Active Living and Healthy Eating among Arabic-Speaking Adults in the Middle East: Preliminary Findings from Cross-Sectional Survey

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Background: Physical inactivity and unhealthy diets increase the risk for diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and cancer. Many people in the Middle East are sedentary and consume diets high in fats, salt and sugar. Understanding health perceptions and behaviors of Arab adults regarding active living and healthy eating can inform the development of tailored and culturally sensitive health promotion program. The purpose of this study was to determine physical activity levels and food habits among Arab adults living in the Middle East.

Methods: A cross-sectional community-based study was conducted with Arab adults from March 2013 to June 2015. Using non-probability sampling technique, participants were recruited from 3 universities, and 7 primary healthcare centers in Qatar. Face-to-face data collection was conducted using a structured questionnaire. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS version 22.0.

Results: Of 1606 Arab adults participants (response rate 52.1%), 50.1% were male and 49.9% were female. The participants' mean (SD) body mass index was 28.03(5.85) Kg/m². Two third of participants were either overweight (36.4%) or obese (33.6%). Participants reported that within the last 7 days, 64% and 39.9% did not engage in vigorous or moderate physical activity, respectively. Within the last 7 days, the mean (SD) time for vigorous physical activity was 31.12 (59.28) minutes, 46.87 (63.01) minutes for moderate physical activity, and 42.01 (47.04) minutes for walking. Male participants spent longer time doing vigorous physical activity and walking compared to females. One third of participants reported eating fresh fruits and vegetables once or more times daily, and consumed fish, beef, or chicken 2-4 times a week. One quarter of participants ate pasta, cakes, or pastries 2-4 times per week.

Conclusion: Participants were not sufficiently active and exhibited poor dietary behavior. There is a need for a nationwide health promotion program to promote a healthier lifestyle. The information from this study can inform public health policies, programs and services in Qatar and in the Middle East