

PRESS RELEASE

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More than a quarter of Croatian islanders obese in spite of the Mediterranean diet

ZAGREB – Overweight and obesity are common among the inhabitants of Croatian islands, in spite of their healthy diet. A study published in the new thematic issue of the Croatian Medical Journal shows that more than a quarter of islanders are obese.

The study was conducted in 2002 and 2003 as a part of the “1001 Dalmatians” research program. It included a representative sample of inhabitants of four Croatian islands: Rab, Vis, Lastovo and Mljet. Researchers from the Andrija Štampar School of Public Health in Zagreb and the Institute for Anthropological Research in Zagreb questioned 454 men and 547 women (average age of 55), measured their height, body mass and blood pressure, and performed biochemical analyses of their blood samples.

Results showed that among islanders 54% of men and 48% of women are overweight, whereas 27 of both men and women are obese. Obesity is defined as overweight by 30 percent of the ideal body weight. Overweight or obese islanders had a higher frequency of risk factors for cardiovascular diseases, such as increased levels of cholesterol and triglycerides in blood, or increased blood pressure.

Regarding dietary habits of islanders, the questionnaire showed that 76% of participants consumed vegetables and fruit 5 to 7 times a week. Olive oil, potatoes and vine were also

frequently on their tables. Ten percent of participants reported to eat fish 5 to 7 times a week, while 35% eat meat 3 to 4 times a week. Interestingly, 70% of islanders reported never to drink beer.

High proportion of islanders with increased risk of cardiovascular diseases, found in spite of their healthy diet, is somewhat surprising finding. “This could suggest that the intake of typical Mediterranean foodstuffs is decreasing, whereas the intake of meat is on the increase”, explain the authors of the study. “The change in dietary pattern is partly related to the change in lifestyle which occurred due to socioeconomic factors, existing food markets, and the wide range of industrially prepared foodstuffs available. This change has been facilitated by tourism which has substituted agriculture as the main source of income, as well as by better connections with mainland which enabled better supply with meat and industrially prepared food.”

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