

The 13th European Nutrition Conference, FENS 2019, was held at the Dublin Convention Centre, 15–18 October 2019

Nudge interventions needed to promote healthy diet among employees with physical work and employees not eating in a staff restaurant

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Abstract

Nudge interventions aim at changing people's behaviour by altering the choice architecture of environments. Workplaces provide an appropriate setting for these interventions, since the majority of adults make a remarkable proportion of daily dietary choices there. Using the baseline data of a choice architectural "StopDia at Work" study, we here aim to identify differences in diet quality between various employee groups.

Altogether 1205 employees of 16 Finnish employers answered an anonymous questionnaire comprising items on: 1) work quality (how the employee mainly works: seated, standing or moving a little, moving), 2) habitual eating location (staff restaurant, other restaurant, recreation room/own workstation/etc. place at the workplace, elsewhere), and 3) consumption of vegetables/fruit/berries, unseasoned nuts/almonds/seeds, foods high in salt and fat, foods high in sugar and fat, and water during working hours. A diet quality score was computed based on foods consumed at work. Kruskal-Wallis test was used to assess differences in dietary patterns.

Forty-eight percent of respondents worked mainly seated, 27% by standing or moving a little, and 24% by moving. Twenty-four percent typically ate their main meal in a staff restaurant, 5% in a restaurant outside the workplace, and 67% in a recreation room/own workstation/etc. place at the workplace. Vegetable intake differed depending on work quality ($\chi^2(2) = 25.450$, $p < 0.001$) and eating location ($\chi^2(3) = 27.511$, $p < 0.001$), being the highest among employees working seated, and employees eating in a staff restaurant. Consumption of foods high in salt and fat differed according to work quality ($\chi^2(2) = 22.715$, $p < 0.001$), employees with physical work reporting higher intakes compared to employees working seated ($p < 0.001$). Consumption of nuts/almonds/seeds, foods high in sugar and fat, and water did not differ between employee groups. Diet quality scores differed depending on work quality ($\chi^2(2) = 22.153$, $p < 0.001$), employees working seated, standing or moving a little scoring higher than employees with physical work ($p < 0.01$).

Employees with physical work had poorer diet quality than employees with sedentary work. As nudge interventions are assumed to influence behaviour independent of individual's background, they thus provide a potential approach to target also employees with physical work. Consumption of vegetables was lower among employees not eating in a staff restaurant. Therefore, nudge interventions aimed at increasing vegetable intake should be designed also to other workplace settings than staff restaurants, the predominant study setting thus far.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.