



HabEat

Determining factors and critical periods in food habit formation and breaking in early childhood: a multidisciplinary approach

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**Medium-scale Collaborative Project
SEVENTH FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME**

Priority: Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, Biotechnology

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New or adapted tools to assess parental feeding practices and food habits/preferences, at different periods in large scale studies

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Workpackage concerned: WP1

Concerned workpackage leader: INSERM

Dissemination level: CO (confidential)

As some of the data contained in this report has not yet been submitted for publication, we changed the dissemination level from Public to confidential until the publications will be accepted. The summary is Public. The present version will remain confidential after publication. However, a public version will be prepared containing the abstracts and the links to the related papers.

Summary

Food habits developed in early childhood persist in adulthood, thus playing a long-lasting role on our eating behaviours. Investigating food habits development during the first years of life permits the identification of key periods in their formation and the development of interventions to improve food habits. Many tools have been developed to understand eating behaviour formation, but a review of literature (de Lauzon et al, 2012) highlighted two gaps in the methods to measure parental feeding practices, child's eating behaviour, and child's food preferences.

Our first objective was to design and validate a new questionnaire which assesses parental feeding practices and child's self-regulation of food intake in order to establish potential relationships between these dimensions. Our second objective was to develop a test to facilitate direct interviews with children on their food preferences using foods with different sensory properties. The originality of the present research was to develop and validate these two tools in parallel in three countries: France, Portugal and Greece.

Parents of 1 to 5-year-old children were recruited in schools and nurseries in the 3 countries to complete a questionnaire about their feeding practices, the child's capacity to regulate his/her food consumption, and the child's height and weight. A subsample of parents was asked to complete the questionnaire twice with a 3-week delay to assess test-retest repeatability. Five-year-old children were interviewed individually via kindergarten in each country. They were asked to rate how much they liked a large range of foods presented on pictures (different fruits, meats, desserts etc.). A subsample of children was interviewed a second time 3 weeks later to assess test-retest repeatability.

Using Structural Equation Modelling models, the results validated the consistency of most of the dimensions of the questionnaire, and some food dimensions of the test of liking. Test-retest analysis confirmed the repeatability of the questionnaire and the test of liking. All together the results highlight the reliability of these tools.