Identification and prevention of dietary-and lifestyle-induced health effects in children and infants (IDEFICS)

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IDEFICS ended in February 2012.

The environment of infants and children has drastically changed in Europe during the last decades as reflected in alterations of behaviour, unhealthy dietary habits, and low physical activity. Dietary as well as lifestyle factors appear to play a part in the development of overweight, obesity, metabolic syndrome, type II diabetes and musculoskeletal disorders.

To stop the epidemic of diet- and lifestyle-induced morbidity in European children, IDEFICS will (1) enhance the knowledge of the health effects of a changing diet and an altered social environment and lifestyle of infants and children and (2) develop, implement and validate specific intervention approaches, focusing on the age group of 2 to 10 years.

The study is designed to run for five years and is funded by the European Commission (DG Research). 24 renowned research institutes and small and medium sized enterprises located in 10 different EU-countries are participating in the IDEFICS-Study, which will commence September 2006.

Surveys will help to assess the prevalence of overweight, obesity, metabolic syndrome, diabetes (type II), scoliosis and related risk factors. This forms the basis for the investigation of effects of diet, lifestyle, psychological, biochemical and genetic factors and their interaction in the development of overweight, obesity and other developmental disorders. Promotion and prevention modules will be implemented and evaluated in kindergartens and schools in eight European countries in order to develop efficient evidence-based approaches.

The Integrated Project (IP) shall identify a risk profile inventory for children susceptible to the named disorders and their co-morbidity and shall devise tailored prevention strategies that are effective, easy to implement and that account for the needs of different social groups. Genetic and non-genetic factors, psychosocial background and social settings will be considered simultaneously in the research. Population-based studies will investigate the impact of sensory perception and provide results concerning short and long-term effects of food choices. Children’s consumer behaviour, its determinants and its relation to overweight and obesity, will also be assessed. The IP will consider societies use of information on individual risk factors as well as on individuals rights and responsibilities. The ethical implications of a "right not to know" of genetic factors and the use of individual data will be addressed. Other ethical aspects raised by the research of IDEFICS, in particular in relation to social class and gender, will be part of the investigation process. The IP will provide a knowledge-based set of guidelines on dietary, behavioural and lifestyle activities for health promotion and disease prevention in children for scientists, health professionals, policy makers, stakeholders, channels, and consumers at a pan European level and for individual countries.
For more information:

www.ideficsstudy.eu/idefics/