Overnutrition and undernutrition: two sides of the same coin

Antonia Trichopoulou

With respect to the consequences of over-nutrition, it is correctly indicated that overweight and obesity (the key intermediates to morbid outcomes) are largely a reflection of changing lifestyles, over and beyond the increased energy intake. This is because urbanization did not only increase the exposure to the globalization-related availability of energy dense and saturated fat, sugar and salt rich foods, but also imposed reduction of physical activity, which is as, or more, important than energy intake for the generation of overweight and obesity at the population level. Urbanization is inherently associated with reduction of physical activity, and this can be countered by both education and public measures (e.g. pedestrian-friendly streets, parks, etc.).

Another way to counter food pattern globalization consequences would be to try to revive traditional diets and traditional foods (Trichopoulou A, Soukara S and Vasilopoulou E Trends in Food Science & Technology 18, 2007). Traditional diets are generally, though not always, plant-based and healthy; tradition rarely honors unhealthy diets. Traditional foods can be improved with a few changes (they are frequently rich in salt for preservation purposes) and they form the backbone of traditional diets which are inherently environment-friendly and eminently sustainable. Again, here, education is critical, but the scientific community, as well as chefs can play an important role.

