



Unbalanced nutrition affects all social strata

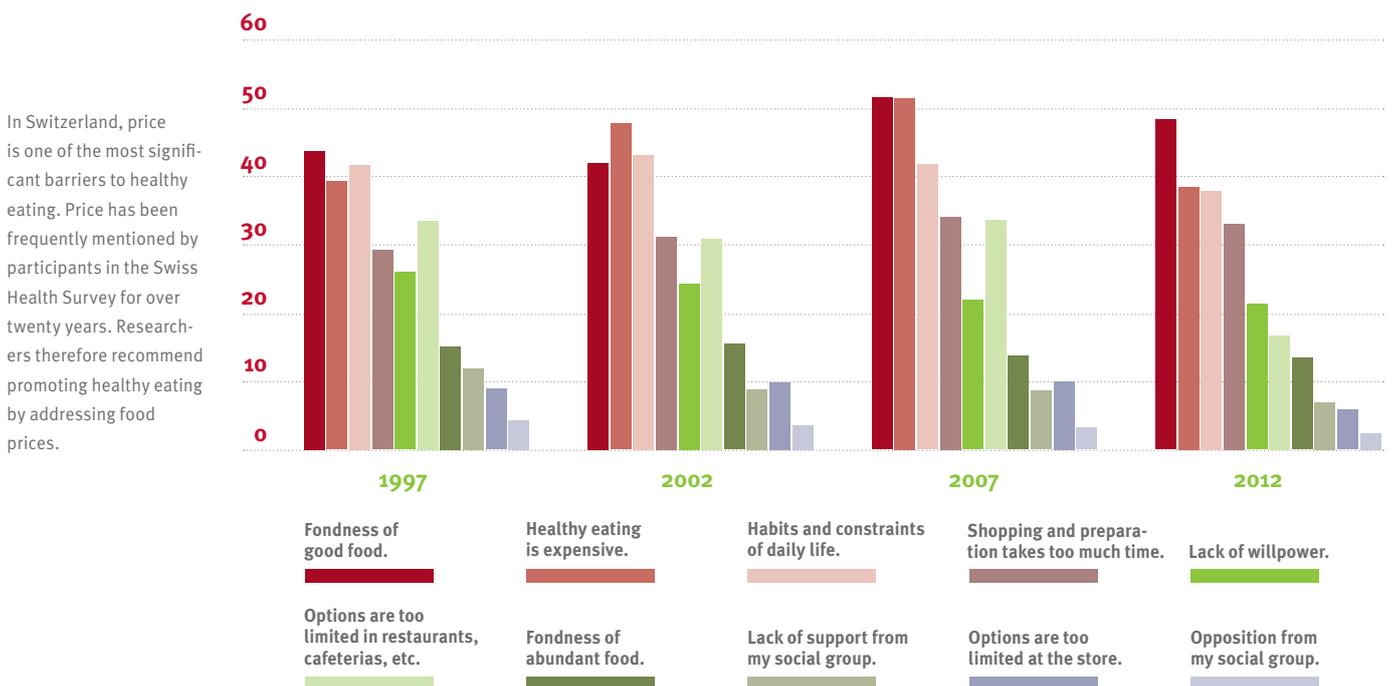
Swiss people are only partially following nutritional recommendations – resulting in an unbalanced diet. Until now, little has been known about the reasons why Swiss consumers refrain from eating healthily, and whether the barriers to a healthy diet vary across different social strata. As part of the NRP 69, researchers investigated the eating habits of people living in Western Switzerland and ascertained the key reasons that keep them from eating healthily. Interestingly, these barriers affect all social strata. The researchers recommend that healthy eating should be promoted in Switzerland by reducing prices of healthy foodstuffs, particularly fruit and vegetables.

Nutritional recommendations are largely ignored in Switzerland, with the result that the population is following an unbalanced diet. A diet rich in fat and sugar favours the development of obesity and of various chronic ailments such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and cancer. These chronic conditions are becoming increasingly commonplace, and have consequences for the healthcare system and the economy. According to recent studies, people from disadvantaged social strata are primarily affect-

ed by these chronic diseases. The research assumes this is in part because these disadvantaged strata feed themselves less healthily than groups that are in a better socio-economic position.

As part of their NRP 69 project, researchers at Lausanne University and the University Hospital of Geneva investigated the actual influence of social differences on nutrition and health in Switzerland. Their results, which expand knowledge

Trends in barriers to healthy eating in Switzerland, prevalence in %



on the nutrition of people in Western Switzerland, indicate that social factors only have a limited influence on eating habits.

Neither good nor bad eating habits are restricted to particular population groups.

Scientists analysed data from various population surveys. Based on data from Bus Santé in Geneva (over 20,000 participants) and the Co-Laus Study in Lausanne (over 6,000 participants), they were able to identify three different dietary patterns among the Western Swiss population. The first profile is called "fish and vegetables" and is considered as healthy, as it correlates with fibre, carotene and vitamin D. The two other profiles are less healthy. Labelled "meat and chips" and "fatty and sugary", they are associated with cholesterol and foodstuffs which are high in energy, sugar and fat. The results of the analysis show that the diets of older people and people of normal weight are more likely to keep with the "fish and vegetables" and "fatty and sugary" profiles. This also applies to consumers from Southern Europe, who follow a Mediterranean diet. Men, people with fewer educational qualifications or with a sedentary lifestyle tend to match the "meat and chips" and "fatty and sugary" profiles. When comparing data collected between 1993 and 2014, researchers noted a slight improvement in the eating habits of people in Western Switzerland. The "fish and vegetables" profile increased among men and women in all age

groups, whereas the "meat and chips" and "fatty and sugary" profiles declined. Interestingly, the "fish and vegetables" profile increased the most among people with fewer educational qualifications. These differentiated results show that there are no clear boundaries between the nutritional habits of people from different social strata. Neither good nor bad eating habits are restricted to particular population groups.

At the same time, the researchers investigated the most important barriers to healthy eating in Switzerland, based on data from the Swiss Health Survey. They identified five main barriers: price, daily habits and constraints, fondness of good food, time constraints and lack of willpower. These disincentives vary depending on the age and body weight of the people surveyed, but also depending on certain socio-economic criteria. The high price of healthy products was mentioned particularly by people with low income. People with fewer educational qualifications claimed more often to have a fondness for good food. In contrast, consumers who were in a better socio-economic position reported time constraints, a lack of willpower or daily habits and constraints as the main barriers to healthy eating.

Further information:
www.nrp69.ch

Recommendation

Supporting healthy eating via food prices

The project results show that price and various personal reasons influence eating habits. Since it is difficult to change consumers' individual disincentives, the researchers recommend promoting healthy eating in Switzerland by reducing the price of healthy foodstuffs, particularly fruit and vegetables. This price

reduction could take the form of greater support for domestic production. Since healthy and less good eating habits occur in all social strata, and since there are many barriers to healthy eating, the researchers suggest selecting extensive measures that do not focus on certain population groups.