

*7th Annual Global Child Nutrition Forum &
Annual National Conference
Baltimore, Maryland USA*

GREECE

There are Health Education Programmes supervision of the Greek Education Ministry that are being organized for the elementary schools and also for high-schools. The implementation of Health Education Programmes into Greek schools focuses on the active and experiential learning of a healthier life style for students. However, Health Education Programmes (HEP) deal with a variety of topics such as drugs, malnutrition, sexually transmitted diseases, traffic accidents, school stress etc. It is obvious that nutrition is not the only or even the main topic of these programmes. It has to be pointed out that these HEP are not referred to all students of all schools, but only take place after a certain application from the teacher/tutors of the specific classes interested in having such an extracurricular activity.

The selection of the topics is being made from the class and its tutors, who apply to the specific department of the Education Ministry for admission to proceed with the Health Education Programme. This whole project is voluntary for the teacher and the students. The topic is being approached in a different way than the every day learning procedure, with the implementation of new teaching methods such as a more active participation of the students, where they are expected to make presentations for their classmates and/or visit premises of factories etc. The duration of such Programmes is at most cases for several months during the school year, with 1-2 hours a week provided for the different activities or meetings. At the end of the year there is the opportunity for the different classes of the different schools to present their work (demo videos, cd's, leaflets, books, theatre plays etc).

Among the many different topics that were being addressed during the last years here are some titles:

- ❖ Healthy Diet – Fitness
- ❖ Obesity
- ❖ Olive oil, the base element of a healthy diet
- ❖ Mediterranean Diet
- ❖ Nutrition and health
- ❖ Diet – Smoking – Traffic accidents
- ❖ Genetic Altered Products
- ❖ Nutrition – various
- ❖ Advertising and milk products
- ❖ Dietary habits of students and their relation to certain diseases
- ❖ Nutrition and consumers
- ❖ Traditional Greek diet
- ❖ Nutrition and psychological aspects
- ❖ Products on our table - do we know what we eat?
- ❖ Nutrition and sports
- ❖ Bulimia – Anorexia nervosa
- ❖ ...

As it is obvious from the titles, these programmes cover a wide range of nutrition related topics helpful to students. But this is not the whole truth. Since these programmes are not for all students one can easily understand that only a minority of Greek students (of the elementary or of high schools) participate in such programmes during their school years. On the other hand, despite the sometimes very interesting achievements from different classes (educational cd's, leaflets, etc), these are not being distributed to other schools, but mostly remain unused.

Apart from the efforts made by the Education Ministry to educate students on several health related topics, this Ministry together with the ministry of Health are responsible for the products allowed to be served or sold by schools tuck-shops.

Every school has a school tuck-shop, which is mostly run by independent (not related to the school) individuals, who more often are not professionals in catering. There are certain rules about the products allowed to be available in a school tuck-shop; theoretically all the “healthy” (yoghurt, milk, non-sugar juices, etc) are allowed and all those providing too many fat and calories are being banned. However, state commissions at their random checks, usually (up to 70%) find all the “unhealthy” products available to students.

A catalogue of the products allowed to be served from tuck-shops follows:

- Sandwiches or toasts with cheese. Fresh butter, fresh vegetables (e.g. tomato) are allowed)
- Bread and other simple bread products (rusk, bretzel etc, but not croissants)
- Bread with raisins (self pack)
- Cheese-pie, Spinach-pie
- Cheeses (different types)
- Fresh Milk (packed, homogenised, pasteurized)
- Yoghurts of any type (without sugar or artificial colours or flavours)
- Fresh fruits (washed and packed)
- Fresh juices (100%)
- Dried fruits
- Tea
- ALL OTHER PRODUCTS¹ ARE NOT ALLOWED

Theoretically, the options for the students, seen for their nutritional value are optimal. However, this is again not the whole truth. Since most schools are within the cities (only some privates schools are in remote areas due to their need for larger

¹ Chocolates, chocolate drinks, chips, fanta, sprite, pepsi or coca cola, pizzas, sweets, etc

premises), the students have the chance to buy every kind of products from shops nearby their school during the break. And this despite the fact that theoretically it is not allowed for the students to leave the school premises before the end of the lessons. According to different studies the average student needs 10-15 euros (13-18\$) every week for the tuck-shop. Only few students bring a small meal or fruits from their home, since this not accepted as “cool” by their schoolmates.

It is important to note that public schools in Greece for decades operate in a double shift (due to not enough premises), and this is changing during the last years. However, there are still several schools with a second afternoon shift (14:00-20:00). At theses schools the classes are divided into two –every week– rotating groups. Students on the afternoon shift mostly leave home before their parents return from work, hence usually skip a lunch.

On the other hand, during the last years the “all-day-school” was introduced, in an effort to have students still at school doing their homework, while their parents are still at their jobs. These students have the possibility to bring their own lunch. Refrigerators and microwave ovens are provided at most schools, but there are only few schools with a separate room for eating. So, the students tend to use their learning tables during their lunch, which of course are far away from being characterised as clean enough.