



## The importance of breakfast

Arianna Parodi

Gaslini Institute

Centre for the Prevention and Treatment of Childhood Obesity

Cardiff, 17-18 March 2009

Content Workshop

The views expressed in this presentation are purely the authors' own and do not reflect the views of the European Commission.



### What is the meaning of eating?

The primitive function of food is to provide the body with all the nutrients and elements needed to grow, develop, survive and perform vital functions, but eating habits are much more than that. Food habits express who we are and how we are feeling, provide a way of relating to other people, sharing with the people we live and also with the environment and surroundings. Food habits are part of culture, traditions and personal history. Modifying such structured habits is difficult.

### EUROPEAN DIET: why do they eat?

Diet depends on many different factors, including climate, infrastructure and development of the region, agriculture, political and economical aspects and transport.

People's food choices are influenced by: psychological factors; food preferences and dislikes; uses and traditions; culture, social values, food symbolism, beliefs and religion; education; economic factors; aesthetic factors; age; physiology; mass communication and advertising; and family and friends.

According to a pan-European survey the main influences on food choices for consumers in the European Union aged 15 years and over are food quality (including food safety), price, taste, awareness about healthy eating and the family.

### EUROPEAN DIET: when do they eat?



Eating schedules are not the same in every European country, but there is a **common trend** towards an increasing proportion of food being eaten outside of formal meals



Surveys on the eating habits of children and young people report **snacking behaviour as extremely common**.

The 1992 national consumption food survey in the Netherlands reports that foods eaten between meals supply an important proportion of total daily caloric intake, and this proportion peaks in boys and girls aged 13 to 16 years.

Data from the United Kingdom suggest a proportion similar to that in the Netherlands, whereas the proportion is not that high among children in Spain, where the midday meal (early afternoon) is the main meal of the day and is often provided by the school or eaten at home.

### EUROPEAN DIET: With whom do children eat and who prepares their food? (1)



According to a European Food Information Council survey carried out in four European countries (France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom), children significantly influence the choice of what they eat for breakfast, both on weekdays and weekends. For lunch and dinner, the mother usually decides what to eat and prepares the food. This survey suggests that few fathers in these countries play a part in selecting food for their children.



### EUROPEAN DIET: With whom do children eat and who prepares their food? (2)

The European Food Information Council survey shows that dinner is the meal eaten most frequently with the family. Lunch is often eaten with one or both parents, especially on weekends.



During the week, eating habits for lunch vary according to differing school schedules. Thus, a high percentage of children in France, Italy and Germany (41–77%) have lunch with their families, compared with only 4% in the United Kingdom. About 50% of the children usually have breakfast with one or both parents on weekdays and a higher percentage on weekends in all four countries.



### Fruits and vegetables

The 1993–1994 WHO Health Behaviour of School-Aged Children (HBSC) Study reported wide variation between countries in the proportion of respondents who ate fruit every day, ranging from 31% for 11-year-old boys in Greenland to 91% in 13-year-old girls in the Czech Republic. In many countries fewer 15-year-olds than 11-year-olds said they ate fruit at least once every day. In general, less than half of the pupils ate raw vegetables daily, and slightly more girls than boys.



### Whole-grain bread

According to HBSC data, countries differ substantially in the proportions of young people who reported eating whole-grain bread daily. This is caused in part by cultural factors and the types of bread available.

In Denmark and Finland, large proportions of pupils (about 70–80%) said they usually eat this kind of bread

Other countries as Austria, Spain, Sweden or Wales the intake was considerably lower (about 15–35%).



### Soft drinks



Soft drinks were consumed more frequently on a daily basis in Belgium (60%), Scotland (52%) and Wales (44%), versus northern countries (10%) or Spain (26%).

According to the national food consumption survey in the Netherlands, younger children usually have milk, soft drinks, fruit, cakes and sweets between meals. Older children have soft drinks, sweets and nuts during the day more often than do younger children.



### Sweets – Candies:



About 70% of pupils from Scotland and Northern Ireland reported eating candy or chocolate bars most frequently,

only about 10–40% of pupils in Northern Europe reported doing so



### Breakfast: why is it so important?

Breakfast eaters have higher daily intakes of micronutrients and are more likely to meet nutrient intake recommendations compared with breakfast skippers. Nutrients that seem to be particularly affected across a variety of studies and population groups include vitamins A and C, riboflavin, calcium, zinc, and iron.

Eating breakfast is associated overall with more healthful food choices or diet habits in children and adolescents. Breakfast skippers are more likely to have overall diets defined as poor or inadequate. Breakfast skipping also has been associated with increased snacking or higher intakes of high-fat snacks. Omitting breakfast was associated with omission of other meals by adolescents.

The frequency of eating breakfast was significantly and positively associated with calcium intake. Calcium intake is a critical nutritional issue for children and adolescents because bone calcium accretion is highest during adolescence. A significant number of children, particularly female adolescents, do not meet the Adequate Intake recommendations for calcium.

Fiber intake results significantly higher in breakfast eaters vs. skippers, and the inclusion of a ready-to-eat cereal seemed to contribute to daily fiber intake

### Breakfast: why is it so important?

Breakfast consumption may positively benefit cognitive function, particularly memory; academic performance; school attendance rates; psychosocial function; and mood.

Although study results are inconsistent, breakfast consumption may be associated with more healthful body weights in children and adolescents, despite possibly higher daily energy intakes in breakfast consumers.

Skipping breakfast is a common behavior observed in overweight or obese children and adolescents and may be related to dieting and disordered eating habits.

Breakfast skippers may be less likely to engage in physical activity, which may contribute to positive energy balance and weight gain.

### Breakfast in Europe (1)



In countries in northern and central Europe, breakfast is traditionally an important meal of the day, whereas in southern Europe it does not get the same attention, and many people eat very little for breakfast, if any at all.

**UK: 9% of the children do not usually have breakfast**

**Germany: 1% of the children do not usually have breakfast**

**Belgium: high prevalence of skipping breakfast**

**Spain: the proportion of children skipping breakfast has been decreasing in recent years.**



### Breakfast in Europe (2)



Generally in Europe traditional cooked breakfast has largely been replaced by **simple, light foods** mainly eaten cold: the types of foods consumed at breakfast were similar across various population groups. **Milk** is one of the most commonly consumed foods by children at breakfast. **Breakfast cereals**, which usually are consumed with milk, also are popular. Various breads also are commonly consumed.

Major changes observed in breakfast consumption patterns over a 26-year period include the increased consumption of low-fat milk, ready-to-eat cereals, and juices, and the decreased consumption of high-fat milk, whole-grain breads, and eggs.



### Breakfast in Europe (Traditional Breakfast: some examples)



**Continental breakfast** is an institutional meal plan based on lighter Mediterranean breakfast traditions. A typical Continental breakfast consists of coffee and milk or hot chocolate with a variety of sweet cakes such as **brioche** and pastries, often with a sweet jam, cream, or chocolate filling. It is often served with juice. The continental breakfast may also include sliced cold meats, such as **salami** or **ham**, and **yogurt** or **cereal**.



**Boiled eggs** with **soldiers** are a popular breakfast meal in **GB** although like the full English breakfast they are mainly eaten at the weekend. Porridge is a traditional breakfast in Scotland as well as the rest of Britain in the winter months.

### Breakfast in Europe (Traditional Breakfast: some examples)

**Belgium.** The breakfast in Belgium consists of breads, toasted or untoasted, with several marmalades, jams, and nut spreads, such as **Nutella** or just with a bar of chocolate. Other common toppings include sliced meats and cheeses. Pastries and croissants may be served on Sundays, but are mostly not eaten on weekdays. Belgians often enjoy coffee, tea, hot chocolate, water, or fresh juice with breakfast.

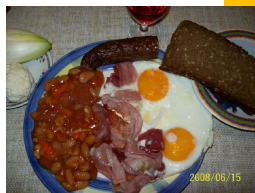


**Bulgaria.** Breakfast usually consists of various kinds of savoury or sweet pastry, with cheese, meat or jam filling. The most typical breakfast consists of two slices of **burek** and a glass of **yogurt**. Breakfast also often consists of open sandwiches. The sandwich is buttered (with margarine), with toppings such as **prosciutto** and yellow **cheese**.



### Breakfast in Europe (Traditional Breakfast: some examples)

**Poland.** The traditional Polish breakfast is a large spread with a variety of sides eaten with bread or toast. Sides include various cold cuts, meat spreads, the Polish sausage **kielbasa**, tomatoes. Quark cheese is the breakfast classic and comes in many forms (it can be eaten plain, with salt, sugar, or honey). Eggs are served often as the main breakfast item, mostly soft-boiled or scrambled. For a quick winter breakfast, hot oatmeal, to which cocoa is sometimes added, is often served. Breakfast drinks include coffee, milk (some areas may serve fresh milk from the cow), hot cocoa, or tea. Traditionally, the Poles avoid heavy-cooked foods for breakfast.



### Breakfast in Europe (Traditional Breakfast: some examples)

**Italy.** The traditional breakfast in **Italy** is simply **Caffè e latte** with bread or rolls, butter, and jam. **Fette biscottate** (a cookie-like hard bread often eaten with **Nutella**) and **biscotti** (cookies) are commonly eaten. Children drink hot chocolate, plain milk, or hot milk with very little coffee. If breakfast is eaten in a **bar** (coffee shop), it is composed of **cappuccino e brioche** (frothed hot milk with coffee, and a pastry).



It is very common for Italians to have a quick breakfast snack during the morning (typically a **panino**, or bread roll).

### Breakfast in Europe (Traditional Breakfast: some examples)

**Spain.** In Central [Spain](#) the traditional breakfast is *chocolate con churros* — hot chocolate with Spanish-style fritters, which are extruded sticks of [doughnut](#). The chocolate drink is made very thick and sweet. This meal is normally served in cafeterias. In the South and West it is more common to have a cup of coffee (usually with milk) and a toast with a choice of [olive oil](#) and salt, [tomato](#) and olive oil, [butter](#), jam, pâté, *jamón serrano* (cured ham).

Freshly squeezed orange juice is widely available in most places as an alternative for coffee. The breakfast is not often larger than these two items, because usually in late morning there is a break known as *almuerzo* when there is a snack.



### In conclusion...

For a healthful breakfast, children should include foods from a variety of food groups (e.g., whole grain, fruit, and dairy) to ensure that they receive a variety of nutrients and fiber.

Consumption of a high-fiber, low-sugar, fortified, ready-to-eat cereal likely will provide additional benefits to nutrient and fiber intakes.

Children who tend to skip breakfast because of a lack of time in the morning should eat breakfast either at school or on their way to school. Many breakfast foods can be consumed while on the go, for example, dry cereal, whole-grain toast or bagel, 100% juice in a to-go container, and fresh fruit.

# Thank you!

*This presentation arises from the project ACTIVE which has received funding from the European Union, in the framework of the Health Programme*

The views expressed in this presentation are purely the authors' own and do not reflect the views of the European Commission.

