



Characterization of out-of-home food consumption of the student community at Fernando Pessoa University

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Eating out among university students has increased due to lifestyle changes and may influence dietary habits and health. It is essential to promote healthy eating habits during this critical period of academic training and personal development.

Objectives: The aim of this study was to characterise food consumption outside the home among the student community at Fernando Pessoa University, exploring factors associated with eating out, the meals consumed outside the home and the foods most commonly chosen.

Methodology: An observational study was conducted, with data collected through a self-completed online questionnaire. Data collected included sociodemographic characteristics, eating habits at home and outside the home, food and beverage consumption, and preferred eating locations.

Results: The sample included 27 participants, most of whom were female (74.1%), with a mean age of 24.7 years (standard deviation = 5.38) and mean body mass index of 23.3 kg/m², which corresponds, on average, to the healthy range for body mass index. Most participants (70.4%) were enrolled in the Nutrition Sciences programme, a factor that should be considered when interpreting the findings. During the week, 85.2% ate meals outside the home, and during the weekend, food consumption outside the home was 51.9%. The main factors influencing the choice of eating-out locations during the week were price, location and food quality, whereas atmosphere and menu variety were more relevant during the weekend. Among participants who reported eating outside the home, frequent consumption of fruit, vegetables and water, together with a low consumption of ready meals and salty snacks, was observed. These findings may reflect the high food literacy of the sample rather than an effect of eating out itself. Furthermore, the small sample size limits the generalisability of the findings.

Conclusion: Out-of-home food consumption was common among students at Fernando Pessoa University. Although participants reported several indicators of healthier food choices, particularly frequent consumption of fruit, vegetables and water, these findings should be interpreted with caution due to the small sample size and the predominance of Nutrition Sciences students in

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the sample. Further studies including larger and more representative samples are needed to better characterise out-of-home food consumption among university students and to support the development of nutrition intervention strategies in higher education institutions.
