

HELENA (“Healthy Lifestyle in Europe by Nutrition in Adolescence”) (Project no.: FOOD-CT-2005-007034)

The HELENA Project is a comprehensive three year research programme, spanning 10 countries and 26 partners, using a common methodology designed to assess and understand the nutritional status and behaviour, as well as the fitness and physical activity patterns, of more than 3000 adolescents aged 12.5 to 17.5 years. It is a European Union Sixth Framework project that was officially concluded in April 2009. Dissemination of the project was an important consideration from the start, and even in the proposal we had already included a complete work package devoted to dissemination. All of the planned dissemination activities were successfully performed, in addition to several new initiatives that were considered relevant. Dissemination activities started at the beginning of the project and are planned to continue for at least five years after the official closing of the project (April 2014).

Communication plan

General diffusion activities

We prepared three international press releases, which included the main results obtained from the project. These were distributed to the main mass media in each of the countries where the project was developed. We made significant impact, with several types of written and audiovisual media (www.helenastudy.com/articles.php, <http://www.helenastudy.com/videos.php>).

The National Education authorities were asked to be involved in the project from the beginning. Each partner kept both the participating adolescents and their parents informed in an active way. Brief reports of the main results of the study were given to each adolescent. A report of the results obtained in the HELENA project, in terms of the ability to improve health education in schools was prepared. The National Health Authorities were also informed about the main results of HELENA.

International Technology Transfer

We produced a Technology Offer that was disseminated through the Innovation Relay Centre (IRC) Network. It was named: “Food-O-Meter and Activ-O-Meter: web based tools for the determination of the nutritional status”

HELENA website

From the beginning of the project, we created and maintained the HELENA website (www.helenastudy.com). This partially public website is an information resource for the work within the project (details of partners, objectives, work areas, results, working papers, deliverables, etc.) and for related fields of work (links to other projects, services, collaborative efforts, etc.). It also includes a section targeting adolescent consumers, introducing them to the intervention modules and activities.

Food Today articles

Three 'Food Today' articles were produced in five different languages and disseminated both electronically and in paper by EUFIC:

<http://www.eufic.org/gb/food/pag/food49/food493.htm>

<http://www.eufic.org/article/en/page/FTARCHIVE/artid/food-choices-preferences-adolescents-Europe/>

<http://www.eufic.org/article/en/artid/Teen-fitness-Europe/>

HELENA Guidebook

A guidebook was developed. The guidebook showcases all of the project outcomes and contains additional recommendations to organisations involved in improving adolescent nutrition.

Scientific publications

Currently, 42 scientific papers have been published in peer reviewed journals, with an additional 88 papers under development to be submitted to scientific journals. We are also editing a book which includes the standard operating procedures and the tools used in the project.

Scientific presentations

Presentations of the HELENA results at academic conferences were performed by the consortium partners. Currently, 48 presentations have been recorded.

Workshops

1) “Methodological issues in nutrition and lifestyle assessment and intervention in adolescents”. Athens, July 8, 2006. 2) "Current evidence and future perspectives for lifestyle interventions in children and adolescents - HELENA-IDEFICS-ProChildren joint symposium". Stockholm, June 19, 2007. 3) Workshop at the 40th European Society for Paediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition Annual Meeting, Barcelona, May 9, 2007. 4) “Promoting a Healthy European Lifestyle through Exercise and Nutrition in Adolescence”, Granada, April 21-22, 2008. 5) European Congress

of Obesity 2009, Pre-Congress Meeting “Health behaviour and Health status in European adolescents”. Amsterdam, May 6, 2009.

How we reach our target audiences

Every activity described in the previous section was designed to reach different target audiences:

Participating adolescents: report with personal results, intervention activities on the website.

General population and consumers: Press releases, website.

National Health and Education authorities: reports, guidebook, website.

EU SMEs: technology offer, website, guidebook, scientific publications and presentations, workshops.

Scientists: website, guidebook, scientific publications and presentations, workshops.

Stakeholder's consultation

Key to the development of public health recommendations is the understanding and acceptance by key stakeholders, i.e. representatives from organisations involved in the fields of nutrition, public health and child well-being, as well as food producers, retailers, family organisations and consumers. The aim of the consultation was to share our results with key stakeholders and to discuss the implications of these results, ensuring understanding and dissemination to key target audiences.

Challenges and their solutions in the communication plan

The most important challenge was to obtain feedback from the different stakeholders we were consulting with. To deal with this challenge, we organized a successful half-day stakeholder's consultation meeting. However, as this was an innovative exercise, some further challenges were also identified: upon reflection, a full-day session may have been beneficial as discussion time was limited. Additionally, background information could have been disseminated prior to the event to allow participants to study the data and discuss opinions with colleagues.

Measures of success

We were able to submit the project deliverables (59 in total) in due time, and all were accepted by the European Commission. Specific measures of success were the following:

Media coverage: www.helenastudy.com/articles.php, <http://www.helenastudy.com/videos.php>

Technology offer: The tools that were developed and used with HELENA have been optimized in the context of other research projects, and there are plans to use these tools in new intervention studies.

Website (information from the beginning of the study): number of hits: 2.811.777; number of pages visited: 245.602; number of visits: 124.052.

Scientific publications: The mean impact factor of the 42 published papers was 3.94, ranging from 0.4 to 6.7. The best papers were published in: Diabetes Care (n=2), Am J Clin Nutr, J Clin Endocrinol Metab, J Lipid Res and Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.

Workshops: Each of the organized workshops was attended by over 100 scientists. At least 30 posters were submitted in each workshop.

Examples of specific tasks relevant for the success

As an example, we can provide the information obtained in the stakeholder's consultation. When asked about other organisations who ought to be informed about the HELENA study results, there was a general consensus that various directorate generals of the European Commission (SANCO, EAC) ought to be informed as well as the World Health Organisation (WHO), national authorities and European umbrella associations (representing education, sports and patients). The stakeholders recommended that in addition to highlighting the obesity-related information we should include information on other indicators of health and disease: levels of physical activity, iron deficiency, blood pressure and malnutrition. Participants recommended that communications should explain the current situation in Europe today and then provide advice that can help improve diet and lifestyle. Participants were insistent upon the need for positive rather than negative messages such as the role of the family. It was felt that there were findings that could be of interest to the European food industry: a) understanding adolescent health (nutrient deficiencies); b) understanding adolescent behaviour (food choices and preferences, motivating factors); and c) insights gained into consumer-led product development. Representatives from the food industry and SMEs recommended undertaking the following activities: a) provision of tailored information to European food industry umbrella organisations; b) share the final results with the DG SANCO's EU Platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health (the project coordinator presented the project's results in a meeting of the EU Platform); c) liaise with the European Technology Platform (ETP) Food for Life; and d) write-up scientific publications and publications targeting the food industry.

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