

## We are what we eat and what we do

By Milena Stagno and Martina Abela [class: 7 Ankara]

What we eat and whether we exercise or not, affects our health. The media bombards us daily about the problem of obesity in Malta, especially in kids. The problem is real. One can quote results which emerged in a European Health Interview survey, which established that almost one adult in six in the EU is considered obese and that Malta has once again been confirmed as the most obese nation in the European Union. But are we taking it seriously? Nowadays, it may be a little hard to eat healthy food since there are a lot of junk food restaurants around us. We should eat at least three kinds of fruit and vegetables a day. Some people don't give a fig to this eating routine, even though it's very important. Health authorities suggest that we should try to include protein in our diet, because researchers say that more fish, fruit and nuts can reduce the risk of heart-attack. This study was published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition and also confirmed by Professors at King's College in London. Thus we see the importance of a healthier, balanced diet.

This is not always easy. Nowadays most parents work, and unfortunately career is taking priority over family. A study shows that in Malta, there has been an increase in the number of working mothers. The Maltese female activity rate in the labour force has been improving over the last few years, reaching a national record in 2014 with a percentage of 52.1% of women participating in the workforce. This was established by the national Statistics Office of Malta. Consequently, time to cook genuine food and prepare healthy lunches for the family is restricted. So it's becoming much easier to buy ready-made food which contains preservatives, than to prepare genuine home-made meals. Some families are so busy that they simply opt to eat take away food. And to make things worse, for some reason which might be the fact that junk food is cheaper, junk food restaurants tend to attract people especially families with children. Parents buy all types of electronic devices or consoles so as to keep their children quiet, although surveys show that you should not use technology as a bargaining chip with your children. Still, children are spending long hours playing on these gadgets rather than participating in any outdoor sports or doing exercise. Is there anything we can do about all this?

First of all, schools could include physical education on a daily basis in the curriculum. Students often argue in favour of this. In our school, students from the Eko-Skola committee monitor what students prefer to eat during break-time and the results are not so encouraging. In Malta there is the Food and Nutrition Policy and an Action Plan for Malta has been set up for the years from 2015 to 2020. Tuck-shops should have a variety of healthy food, fruit and vegetables. The same thing applies to bars close to football pitches and courts where children train and play on a regular basis. Junk food restaurants should advertise and make offers on their healthier options.

But most importantly parents should realise that their choices have an impact on their children's wellbeing, apart from theirs! If you do not exercise at all, do not fret! Help is at the ready! In Malta, the organisation responsible for the administration of sports facilities in Malta has the challenging task of keeping and maintaining these facilities to the highest possible standards. You can become a healthier and a better person if you walk briskly for half an hour, take part in any sport including team sports or join your local gym. It's important that you exercise at least three times a week. If you don't succeed the first time around, don't worry it isn't your last bite at the cherry. Try again and if you manage to start exercising regularly, you'll succeed. This will make you feel happier and healthier.

If you follow this advice, you will become a better and a stronger person. Let us say that it is not the end of the world if you indulge in junk food or a drink once in a while, but don't have one too many! Moderation is key!



*Let's be honest! Which one is the most popular choice of food here in Malta?*



(Photos taken by Martina Abela)