

And the healthiest Northerners are...

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Nordic women have a healthier diet than their male counterparts, and less than one in ten Nordic children maintain a healthy diet, says new joint Nordic study.

Which Nordic country consumes the most bread, fish and the most candy? Who are the most overweight Northerners and who spends the most time in front of the PC?

The first ever joint Nordic study on diet, physical activity and overweight provides us with the answers.

The *study* [8] was carried out by the National Food Institute at the Technical University of Denmark (DTU Food), together with researchers in the other Nordic countries.

The researchers asked more than 11,500 people in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland about their consumption of selected foods, their physical activity habits and their weight.

Diet reflects level of education

Between 9 percent and 24 percent of Nordic adults and only 8 percent of the children maintain a diet that the researchers estimate to be healthy in relation to the targets that the Nordic Council of Ministers has proposed in '[The Nordic Plan of Action for Better Health](#)' [9].

The study shows that Danes and Norwegians have the healthiest diets, while the Swedes are worst off in this respect.

In all countries, however, the participants' diet and physical activity are far from the objectives set out in 'The Nordic Plan of Action for Better Health'.

Women's diets are healthier than men's

The study also shows that Nordic women tend to eat healthier than men, and that the level of education has an influence on the diet. People with a low level of education eat a more unhealthy diet than those with a higher education.

In the Nordic countries, we generally don't eat enough fruits and vegetables, and our diet is too sweet.

The participants in the study eat sugar-rich foods more than four times a week. In Denmark, Sweden and Finland, people eat fish less than twice a week. Only the participants from Iceland and Norway eat enough fish.

"The findings confirm some of the knowledge we have on what people in the Nordic region eat," says senior adviser Sisse Fagt in a press release from the National Food Institute.

“The study is unique because previously we were not able to compare people's diets and physical activity across national borders, and also because the study is easy and quick to implement. However, the study cannot replace the more in-depth national studies in this field, but it can be complementary.”

Rye bread, sausages and candy

The results show that 40 percent of Danes do not use fat on their bread, while this figure is only 8 percent in Finland.

Icelanders do not eat much bread, while the Danes and the Finns eat the most rye bread.

The Swedes eat more sausages than their neighbours, and Icelanders are top scorers in terms of candy intake. Iceland has a slightly higher proportion of overweight and obese people than the other countries.

Physical activity

The study participants were also asked about their physical activity.

Finland and Sweden have the most physically active people, while Norwegians spend the most time in front of their PC and TV screens.

In none of the countries do children engage in physical activities the recommended one hour a day.

Repeat study to reveal trend

"The study serves as an important baseline study in the Nordic region," says senior adviser Lone Banke Rasmussen, of the National Food Institute.

"When the study is repeated in 2014, it will be possible to see how dietary habits and the level of physical activity are developing and thus whether the trend is moving in the right direction in all areas."

The results can be used to inform decisions to launch preventive activities at Nordic as well as at national level.

 [People in the Nordic countries generally don't eat enough fruits and vegetables, and the diet is too sweet, concludes the first ever joint Nordic study on diet physical activity and overweight. \(Photo: Wikimedia Commons\)](#) [10]
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Fact box

The study is based on telephone interviews with more than 9,000 adults and almost 2,500 children aged 7-12.

The participants were asked how often they eat selected foods, and how much time they spend on various forms of physical activity during the week.

The questionnaire consists of 15 questions about diet, six questions about physical activity, along with questions about the participants' education, whether they live in urban or rural areas and their height and weight.

Fact box

The same questionnaire was used in all five countries, enabling comparison of findings across the countries.

The purpose of the study is to compare diet and exercise habits among countries and to monitor progress over time as the study will be repeated every three years.

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[Nordic monitoring on diet, physical activity and overweight. First collection of data in all Nordic Countries 2011 \(PDF\).](#) [8] [Nordic monitoring on diet, physical activity and overweight. Validation of indicators.](#) [16]

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