



## Abstract

# Changes in Eating Habits and Contributing Factors during the COVID-19 Pandemic among Medical Students in the Slovak Republic <sup>†</sup>

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**Abstract:** Due to the outbreak of the new coronavirus disease, many lifestyle alterations occurred. Changes in eating habits and contributing factors during the COVID-19 pandemic were examined. A cross-sectional anonymous online survey was conducted among students from the Faculty of Medicine, Comenius University in Bratislava, during November–December 2022. The data were statistically analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics, version 25. The study population consisted of 783 students; the mean age was  $22.7 \pm 2.7$  years; 68.1% studied in the Slovak language; 67.0% of respondents were female. Out of these, eating habits did not change for the majority of students in the study sample (53.1%) (Slovaks 52.6% vs. foreigners 54.0%; males 53.0% vs. females 53.1%); consumption of alcoholic beverages did not change compared to pre-pandemic period for 54.3% of students, the rest of students decreased (30.6%) or increased (15.1%) consumption; energy drinks consumption remained unchanged for 69.6% students; coffee intake stayed stable for 48.3%, whereas 43.8% increased their coffee consumption, while 7.8% drank less coffee, without any statistically significant difference between the subgroups. The level of physical activity (frequency, intensity, duration) changed with a significant difference between Slovak and foreign students ( $p = 0.038$ ), more foreign students decreased their level of physical activity compared to Slovaks (42.3% vs. 33.8%). We also recorded body weight changing during the pandemic, with a statistically significant difference between men and women ( $p = 0.009$ ); 14.3% of men vs. 22.9% women decreased, while 34.7% of men and 27.3% of women increased their body weight. The results showed some changes in the dietary habits and other lifestyle factors during the pandemic among medical students. Future healthcare providers will play key roles in health promotion and disease prevention, and they should serve as role models for their patients and the general public as well.

**Keywords:** medical students; COVID-19; changes; dietary habits



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