

# Health behaviour-patterns among paediatric nurses, employed in medical institutions of Greater Poland

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## Abstract

In the organised approach to health, a vital part is played by health education. Its main purpose is to transform populational attitudes to health and develop the sense of responsibility for it. Children constitute a particularly important populational segment in this respect.

**Purpose:** The aims of this study were to establish pro-health behaviour-patterns among paediatric nurses.

**Material and methods:** Ninety-one randomly selected nurses, employed in the Greater Poland's medical institutions were queried, through a specially designed questionnaire, on their nutritional habits, physical activity, and frequency of consulting their physician. A Microsoft Excel spread sheet was employed in performing statistical calculations, making use of such functions as sum, per cent and arithmetic mean.

**Results:** Almost all subjects eat irregularly. The majority of them have two meals a day, omitting breakfasts. The proportion of ingredients containing fibre in their diet is insufficient, whereas monosaccharides are consumed excessively. The physical activity is about adequate; taking strolls are the preferred form. The respondents tend to overlook the first, disturbing disease symptoms, and rarely consult with their physician.

**Conclusions:** 1. The life-style of paediatric nurses is not conducive to maintaining health, despite declaring the latter as the overriding life's value. 2. Chief aberrations in their health behaviour concern: irregular meals, consuming the excessive amount of monosaccharides, and preferring

the passive forms of leisure. 3. In nurses' educational curriculum the role of health promotion in human life should be re-assessed, while the importance of health education in their future work should be emphasised.

**Key words:** health behaviour, medical personnel, health education, life-style.

## Introduction

At the time of changes in thinking about health, the role of individual attitudes to that priceless value, its maintaining and strengthening, is more and more emphasised. These attitudes are most frequently expressed as health behaviour-modes, behaviour-patterns related to health or preventive activities [1]. A definition of such attitudes, allowing for the role of knowledge and its influence on maintaining health, was formulated by Puchalski: health behaviour-patterns denote the individual types of behaviour that are vitally associated with his/her health [2]. It has been proven that actions undertaken by individuals stem from their socialising experiences – primarily through interaction with the immediate social environment [3]. Taking into consideration the relationship between health and behaviour, Sęk puts forward various classification criteria of such behaviour-patterns: habits, attitude to health and health consequences, promotional and preventive behaviour-modes as well as – related to a given role – parental and medical healthy and non-healthy behaviour-patterns [4].

Behaviour-modes related to the health of children and adolescents are particularly important, as in this period of life health habits and behaviour-patterns are being shaped, influencing future health of a given individual. Life experiences of young persons, the way they undertake their developmental tasks, i.e. the life-style taking shape – impact strongly on the forming of individual's physical, psychological, and social potential. This developmental period is also characterised by considerable receptivity to external stimuli, originating in various sources.

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Table 1. Regularity of nutrition

Self-assessment of regularity of nutrition	No. of meals a day	Fixed times of having meals	Amount	Per cent
No	Four	No	12	13.19%
	Two	No	49	53.85%
	Five	No	3	3.30%
	It varies	No	1	1.10%
	Seven	No	1	1.10%
	Three	No	15	16.48%
			<b>81</b>	<b>89.01%</b>
Yes	Four	Yes	5	5.49%
	Five	Yes	3	3.30%
	Three	Yes	2	2.20%
			<b>10</b>	<b>10.99%</b>
Total			<b>91</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Medical personnel, taking care of patients in this age-group, should make the most of this openness. Such activities are unlikely to succeed, however, if the personnel is itself short of basic habits, conducive to health.

## Purpose

Behaviour-patterns conducive to health are, in this article, the subject of theoretical analysis and empirical study. The authors interpret them as all forms of human activity which, according to current knowledge, contribute to maintaining, strengthening, and restoring health [5].

Paediatric nurses, taking care of the youngest members of society, play a vital part in propagating the optimal health behaviour-patterns among them. As mentioned earlier, a prerequisite of effective health education is the proper life-style in those who preach it. It is even more effective if the educators not only pass the theoretical knowledge or requirements but also set the good example themselves.

Therefore, the main purpose of the study was to establish health behaviour-patterns manifested by paediatric nurses (a nurse constantly in touch with children hospital care, outpatient care), regardless of specialisation employed in medical institutions of Greater Poland.

## Material and methods

A method of diagnostic opinion poll was employed. The design of the study of the subjects' behaviour-patterns was such that they themselves supplied the necessary data by means of oral or written communication, which simplified the process [6]. The specially constructed questionnaire was the study's tool. The group of respondents comprised 91 randomly selected nurses, employed in intramural and extramural medical institutions in Greater Poland. The study proper was preceded by a pilot check. A Microsoft Excel spread sheet was employed in performing statistical calculations, making use of such functions as sum, per cent and arithmetic mean.

Figure 1. Having breakfast by nurse before leaving home in the morning

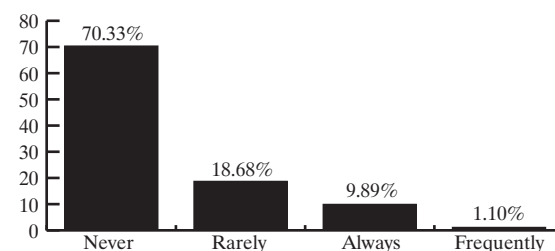


Table 2. Nutrition – health behaviour-patterns

Frequency of consuming	Vegetables and fruit		Milk and its products		Brown bread	
	N	Per cent	N	Per cent	N	Per cent
Everyday	23	25.27%	20	21.98%	15	16.48%
Several times a week	56	61.54%	54	59.34%	27	29.67%
Never	0	0.00%	2	2.20%	4	4.40%
Once a week	12	13.19%	14	15.38%	9	9.89%
Less than once a week	0	0.00%	1	1.10%	36	39.56%
Total	91	100.00%	91	100.00%	91	100.00%

## Results

All health related behaviour-patterns can best be defined as life-style, i.e. an everyday set of diverse behaviour-modes, typical for an individual or a group [7]. The questionnaire was then divided into separate thematic sections related to actions contributing to the healthy life-style of nurses [8].

The first section concerned the quality and regularity of meals. Our data show that over 89% of the studied group eat irregularly. 53.8% have two meals a day. Diverse times of consuming meals throughout the day were also revealed. As many as 70% of the inquired nurses skip breakfasts, and 18% eat them sparsely. Frequently, or even always have breakfast only 19% of the respondents (*Tab. 1, Fig. 1*).

Proper nutrition concerns not only the quantity but also the quality of nutrients. 61% of the nurses declared having vegetables and fruit several times a week. A majority of them (over 70%), everyday or a few times a week drinks milk or its products. Brown bread, a rich source of fibre, is less popular (approx. 40% would have it once a week or less than that) (*Tab. 2*). The consumption of monosaccharides – a dietary error – is very popular among the respondents. Over 75% eat them every day or several times a week (*Tab. 3*).

The next set of questions concerned the physical activity and the forms of leisure. The nurses assess their physical fitness as rather sufficient (75% of responses), while the preferred forms of activity are: taking strolls (61.54%), swimming (19.78%), bicycle riding (13.19%), gymnastics (4.40%), work at garden plot (1.10%).

Most nurses prefer the passive forms of leisure (approx. 80%). This includes: watching TV, on average 2 hours and 13 minutes. This is also the approximate amount of time dedicated to rest. Other activities in the daily schedule of nurses are: professional work, house jobs, and sleep (*Fig. 2*).

Table 3. Nutrition – anti-health behaviour-patterns

Frequency of consuming	Sweets	
	N	Per cent
Everyday	39	42.86%
Several times a week	30	32.97%
Never	2	2.20%
Once a week	6	6.59%
Less than once a week	14	15.38%
Total	91	100.00%

Figure 2. Nurse's daily agenda

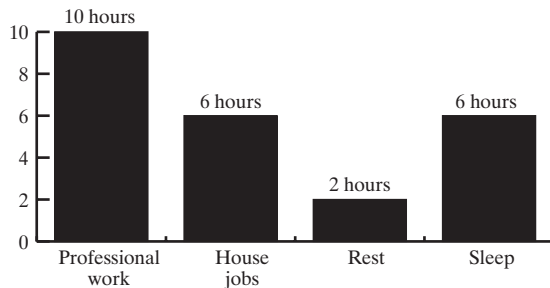
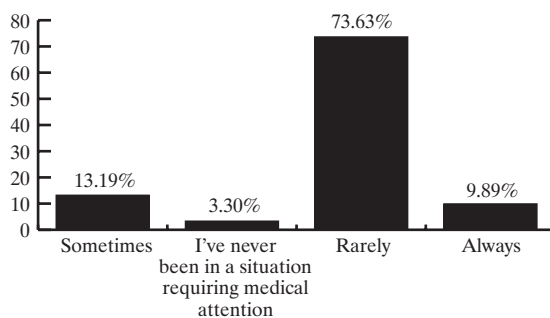


Figure 3. Frequency of consulting a physician by nurses in health-threatening situations



The last section comprised questions involving the frequency of consulting a physician as well as the importance of health in the minds of the nurses. The responses were preceded by a brief self-assessment of health. Almost 88% thought of themselves as “rather healthy”, and 12% as “healthy”. None felt ill. It is surprising in view of the fact that almost 70% of the nurses declared what can be termed as rather flippant attitude towards a healthy life-style. What's more, 74% admitted to seldom seeing their physician, even though the first, alarming symptoms of a disease might have been present (Fig. 3).

The group were also asked to rank, according to importance, such issues as: work, family, health, money, social contacts, and religion. Health came first, then family, work, religion, money and, the least important in the opinion of nurses, social contacts.

## Discussion

Pro-health behaviour-patterns may be manifested in various spheres of human activity. The data presented concerned only

some aspects of the latter – though arguably the fundamental ones. The study comprised a group of persons routinely well equipped in knowledge about health. Still, some gap between theory and practice has been revealed.

Some of the improper habits, detrimental to health, may be due to the specific, professional profile, involving shift work schemes. However, some basic mistakes as, e.g. skipping breakfast, consuming inordinate amount of sweets, instead of nutrients rich in fibre, as brown bread, fruit, vegetables as well as disregarding the prodromal disease symptoms – all require considerable adjustment. It is encouraging, however, that despite some carelessness shown towards one's health, it still constitutes the overriding value, among the studied professional group.

A similar research among nurses was conducted in Kraków in 1997 [9]. Despite the passage of time, and the hoped-for increase in knowledge on factors influencing health, apparently not very much has changed.

Nurses still eat irregularly, devote little time to active recreation and are not much concerned with prevention of diseases on their behalf.

## Conclusions

1. The life-style of paediatric nurses is not conducive to maintaining health, even though it features as the imperative value in their lives.
2. The chief aberrations in health behaviour-patterns of the nurses concern: irregular nutrition, consumption of excessive amounts of monosaccharides, and preference of passive forms of recreation.
3. In education of future nurses, the role of health promotion in human life as well as the importance of health education in their professional activity should be emphasised.

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