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# The quality of nutrition in children, young people and adults in the Guayaquil area

## La calidad de la alimentación en niños, jóvenes y adultos de la zona de Guayaquil

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### Abstract

The project on the quality of the diet and its relation to the nutritional health of children, young people and adults of the Tecnológico Superior Universitario Espíritu Santo, was supported from the social, economic and legal point of view; it will respond to the contributions in the theoretical order related to nutrition and dietetics, sustainable healthy eating and integral wellbeing. The purpose of the research is to create knowledge about the nutritional status of young people aged 17 years and older. The research process on the quality of nutrition in children, youth and adults in the area of Guayaquil is established through a qualitative approach of a documentary nature, the techniques and instruments used are focused on the collection and selection of information through the reading of documents, books and scientific journals. The findings underline the urgent need to raise quality standards in school feeding programmes, improve the dissemination of nutritional information and address the growing problem of overweight in the adult and youth population.

**Keywords:** Quality, Food. Youth, Nutrition, Dietetics

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## Resumen

El proyecto calidad de la dieta y su relación en la salud nutricional de niños, jóvenes y adultos del Tecnológico Superior Universitario Espíritu Santo, fue sustentado desde el punto de vista social, económico y legal; responderá a las aportaciones en el orden teórico relacionado con la nutrición y dietética, alimentación saludable sostenible y bienestar integral. La investigación tiene como propósito crear conocer el estado nutricional de jóvenes comprendidos entre los 17 años en adelante. El proceso de investigación sobre la calidad de la alimentación en niños, jóvenes y adultos de la zona de Guayaquil se establece mediante un enfoque cualitativo de carácter documental, las técnicas e instrumentos utilizados se centran en la recopilación y selección de información a través de la lectura de documentos, libros y revistas de índole científico. Los hallazgos subrayan la necesidad urgente de elevar los estándares de calidad en los programas de alimentación escolar, mejorar la difusión de información nutricional y abordar el creciente problema del sobrepeso en la población adulta y joven.

**Palabras clave:** Calidad, Alimentación, Jóvenes, Nutrición, Dietética

## Introduction

The quality of food is of utmost importance to people because of its direct impact on overall health and well-being. The food we eat provides the essential nutrients our bodies need to function properly, from maintaining energy and proper organ function to strengthening the immune system and preventing chronic diseases. A quality diet, rich in nutrients such as vitamins, minerals, protein and fibre, not only provides us with the elements we need to stay healthy, but also contributes to our quality of life and longevity.

Lack of knowledge about the functioning of the human body and lack of adequate nutrition education is a significant challenge in the fight against malnutrition in various communities and countries. This lack of understanding leads to poor dietary choices that can have adverse long-term health consequences. Without a solid knowledge base about how food affects the body and how to meet its nutritional needs, it is difficult for individuals to adopt healthy eating habits and avoid malnutrition.

Extreme diets, often promoted as quick fixes for weight loss, do not address the underlying problem of lack of nutritional education. These diets are often implemented intermittently and without consideration of the long-term impact on health. Rather than being part of a comprehensive process of change towards healthy eating habits, these diets represent temporary solutions that do not provide a solid foundation for maintaining a nutritionally balanced lifestyle.

To effectively address malnutrition, it is crucial to implement comprehensive educational programmes that teach people about the functioning of the human body and the importance of a balanced diet. These programmes should focus on fostering an in-depth understanding of how nutrients affect health and on promoting sustainable

behavioural changes towards healthy and long-lasting eating habits. In doing so, they can effectively combat malnutrition and promote the overall well-being of affected communities and countries.

The aim of this study is to deepen theoretical knowledge related to nutrition and dietetics, as well as to explore healthy and sustainable eating practices in children, youth and adults in the Guayaquil area. It seeks to understand the interrelationships between nutrition, holistic wellbeing and sustainable development in this specific population, in order to provide recommendations and strategies that promote healthy eating habits and a better quality of life. Through a multidisciplinary approach, the aim is to identify the factors that influence the diet and nutritional status of the community, as well as to propose relevant interventions that address the specific needs of this region.

Deepening theoretical knowledge related to nutrition and dietetics, as well as exploring healthy and sustainable food practices in children, youth and adults in the Guayaquil area, is essential for several very relevant reasons. Firstly, nutrition plays a fundamental role in the health and well-being of people at all stages of life. Understanding how different nutrients affect the human body and how nutritional needs can be adequately met is crucial to prevent disease and promote a healthy lifestyle.

Furthermore, investigating dietary practices in this specific population allows for the identification of challenges and opportunities to improve the quality of life in the community. Guayaquil, as an area with particular demographic and socio-economic characteristics, may present unique dietary patterns that require specialised attention. Delving into these practices not only provides invaluable information on the current nutritional situation, but also allows for the design of effective interventions and policies that address the specific needs of the population, thus promoting long-term health and well-being.

Ultimately, nutrition and dietetics research in Guayaquil contributes to the advancement of scientific knowledge in this field and to the improvement of public health in the region. By generating solid data and evidence, evidence-based programmes and strategies can be developed that address nutritional challenges in an effective and sustainable manner. This not only benefits the local population, but can also have wider national and international implications, helping to build a healthier and more equitable world for all.

Adequate nutrition is not only vital for physical health, but also plays a fundamental role in psychological and emotional well-being, especially during the stage of youth development. For Cortés, L. (2021) a good diet should include a balanced diet in proteins, vitamins and minerals, with a low carbohydrate intake and an abundant intake of water. This allows people to maintain optimal physical, mental and emotional health, which is especially important for young people, as it contributes to maintaining positive self-esteem.

These dietary practices not only promote people's overall well-being, but also have a significant impact on self-esteem, especially in young people. A balanced diet provides

the nutrients necessary for the proper functioning of the body and mind, which translates into increased energy, mental clarity and emotional stability. This, in turn, can strengthen self-confidence and promote a positive body image, thus contributing to healthy self-esteem in young people.

The diet of young people is often characterised by the consumption of fast food with low nutritional content and the omission of important meals such as breakfast, lunch or dinner. Reyes, S., & Canto, M. (2020), also mention that proper nutrition is essential to ensure good health in students, so it is important to pay attention to the type, quantity, quality and timing of the food consumed.

Inadequate nutrition can have negative consequences on young people's academic performance, physical development and emotional well-being. Therefore, promoting healthy eating habits and educating about the importance of a balanced diet can significantly contribute to improving students' quality of life and academic performance.

According to Moreno, J. (2023), food faces complex challenges that encompass social, cultural, environmental, agricultural, economic and political aspects. Therefore, it goes far beyond simply being the intake of food, acquiring profound meanings at various levels, from the individual to the educational, to households, communities and populations.

The relationship between humans and food is a phenomenon that has endured through the ages, manifesting itself in different times, places and contexts, defining the course of major cultures where food represents a crucial element for survival. This importance is reflected in the value that the individual assigns to what he or she consumes, being both acquired and produced for his or her own benefit (More, J., et al., 2021).

This relevance is manifested in the value that the individual places on his or her food, whether in the acquisition or production of food, for the purpose of self-benefit. The way people choose, prepare and consume their food is intrinsically linked to their cultural identities, traditions and beliefs, reflecting a deep connection between human beings and their food environment.

Food has been an issue of constant concern throughout human history. Scientific advances and the development of nutrition as a discipline that studies both the technique and the art of using food properly to achieve a balanced and nutritious diet that satisfies all the needs of the organism, have been fundamental in this process.

As cited by Porras, M., et al. (2021), in order to better understand eating behaviours, it is crucial to understand food as a cultural expression that presents a wide range of variations, from access to food to the meanings attributed to it. Food not only satisfies physical needs, but also carries a symbolic and emotional charge. Food can be associated with celebrations, traditions, cultural identity and family values. The meanings attributed to food vary widely among different social groups and can influence how food is selected, prepared and consumed.

To gain a deeper understanding of eating behaviours, it is essential to recognise that eating is not simply a biological activity, but also a complex cultural expression. This perspective allows us to appreciate the diversity of food practices that exist in different communities and societies around the world. From the types of food available to the rituals associated with eating, each culture has its own unique relationship to food.

For Alva, L., et al. (2021), proper nutrition is crucial for improving athletic performance. Within this framework of weight categories, it is common for athletes to employ certain methods and tactics to reduce their body mass prior to the official weigh-in, in addition to adopting practices and protocols for rapid rehydration and energy recovery during the interval between weigh-in and the start of the tournament.

In the context of competitions requiring weight categories, athletes often resort to methods to manipulate their body weight prior to major events such as the official weigh-in. However, it is important to stress that these practices must be carried out safely and under the supervision of health professionals, as extreme methods can have negative consequences for long-term health and performance.

Understanding the relationship between sports nutrition and food quality allows for a comparative analysis of what children, youth and adults consume in relation to what they should be consuming nutritionally. By exploring how athletes optimise their diet to improve physical and mental performance, we can gain valuable information on the types of foods that are most beneficial to overall health. This approach allows us to assess differences between current dietary practices and nutritional recommendations, identifying potential deficiencies or excesses in the intake of key nutrients.

## Materials and methods

The research process on the quality of nutrition in children, youth and adults in the area of Guayaquil is established through a qualitative documentary approach, with the purpose of understanding the nutritional status of young people aged 17 years and older. This methodological choice is based on the need to understand in depth the perceptions, practices and factors that influence the nutrition of this specific population, as well as the identification of possible nutritional problems and priority areas for intervention (Martínez, J., et al., 2023).

In this process, the techniques and tools used focus on the collection and selection of information through the reading of scientific documents, books and journals. The comprehensive literature review allows obtaining an overview of the nutritional situation in the study area, as well as identifying trends, patterns and relevant knowledge gaps (Tramullas, J., 2020). In addition, tools such as fact sheets are used to organise and systematise the information collected, facilitating its analysis and subsequent interpretation.

The careful selection of the available information guarantees the rigorousness and reliability of the study, making it possible to address the problem of food quality in the target population in a comprehensive and well-founded manner. The use of

documentary tools also offers the advantage of being an inexpensive and accessible methodology, which facilitates its application in contexts with limited resources.

The research process on the quality of nutrition in children, youth and adults in Guayaquil is based on a qualitative documentary approach, where the collection and selection of information through literature review and the use of tools such as fact sheets are essential to achieve the proposed objectives and generate significant knowledge in the field of nutrition and public health (Faneite, S., 2023).

## Results

Ensuring that quality standards are high is essential to protect children's food security. Benites, W., & Johnson, G. (2022), present the characteristics associated with school food security received mainly negative or partially negative responses, which explains the low rating. Lack of dissemination was the main factor contributing to these low levels of appreciation, highlighting the weakness in the socialisation indicator.

The study highlights that the lack of dissemination of information on school feeding programmes was the main factor contributing to the low levels of appreciation. This points to a significant weakness in the socialisation indicator, suggesting that efforts to communicate the importance and benefits of these programmes are not reaching parents, students and communities effectively.

In the results cited by Alvarado, M., & Salazar, M. (2023), it mentions that more than 40.9% of adults in the countries studied are overweight compared to 34.6% previously. In other words, two out of five adults in this region are overweight. This fact highlights the urgency of implementing public policies and health programmes that promote healthier lifestyles. This situation not only affects people's quality of life, but also has important implications for health systems, due to the increase in diseases associated with overweight, such as diabetes and cardiovascular diseases.

With regard to diet, according to the results obtained from Álvarez, M., et al. (2022), 62.1% of young people follow websites that provide information on diets, with 80.7% expressing the intention to prepare them at some point. This information comes mostly from nutritionists, with 63.5%. According to the frequency of food consumption, respondents report an insufficient intake of dairy and dairy products in 84.1%; vegetables in 71.5%; fruits in 78.2%; cereals and their derivatives in 55.2%.

These results indicate that the young people surveyed report an insufficient intake of several essential food groups, such as dairy and dairy products, vegetables, fruits and cereals. This underlines the need for more effective and accessible nutrition education that promotes a balanced and adequate intake of all food groups to improve the health and well-being of this population.

This research provides fundamental data to support the implementation of the project aimed at improving the quality of nutrition in children, youth and adults in the city of Guayaquil. By providing a solid base of information, these studies allow for the development of targeted and effective strategies to address nutritional challenges in

this community, ensuring that interventions are well informed and tailored to local needs.

In addition, these studies provide a detailed understanding of the nutritional status of different age groups in Guayaquil. With this knowledge, it is possible to identify critical areas requiring urgent attention and to monitor the progress of interventions over time. This ensures not only the improvement of the diet and health of residents, but also the sustainability and effectiveness of the nutrition programmes implemented in the area.

The different authors validate the creation of the project on food quality in children, young people and adults in the city of Guayaquil. Benites, W., & Johnson, G. (2022) highlight the need to raise quality standards to protect children's food security. Their studies show a low rating of school food security, mainly due to poor dissemination of information, which underlines the importance of improving communication and socialisation of these programmes. This weakness in dissemination indicates that, in order to ensure food security, it is essential that information about school feeding programmes effectively reach the entire community.

In contrast, the findings of Alvarado, M., & Salazar, M. (2023) reveal an alarming increase in the prevalence of overweight among adults in the countries studied, with a significant proportion of the population affected. This increase highlights the urgency of implementing public policies and health programmes that promote healthier lifestyles, addressing not only dietary quality, but also physical activity and nutrition education. The increasing rate of overweight has serious implications for health systems, as it is associated with an increase in chronic diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease, which reinforces the need for effective and sustainable interventions.

On the other hand, Álvarez, M., et al. (2022) focus on young people's diets, highlighting that, although many follow diet pages and show interest in preparing them, there is an insufficient intake of essential food groups such as dairy, vegetables, fruits and cereals. This discrepancy between the intention and actual practice of a balanced diet suggests that, although there is a growing interest in nutrition, lack of access to or knowledge about a balanced diet remains a problem. It is therefore crucial to develop educational programmes that not only inform, but also facilitate access to nutritious foods and promote healthy eating habits effectively.

These studies provide a solid basis for the implementation of a project to improve the quality of food in Guayaquil. Combining data from different research allows for the development of specific strategies that address the nutritional challenges of each age group. This ensures that interventions are well informed and tailored to local needs, improving the health and well-being of children, youth and adults. In addition, a detailed understanding of nutritional status at different stages of life facilitates the identification of critical areas requiring urgent attention and allows the progress of interventions to be monitored over time, ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of nutrition programmes implemented in the area.

The quality of nutrition in children, youth and adults in the Guayaquil area poses a wide and promising field of study, full of new questions and research to explore, there are still unanswered questions and areas to investigate. What are the socio-economic factors that influence the dietary choices of the population? What is the impact of urbanisation and the availability of processed foods on the diet of the inhabitants of Guayaquil? These are just some of the questions that could guide future research on food quality in Guayaquil, providing a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities for promoting healthy eating in the community.

## Conclusions

The findings underline the urgent need to raise quality standards in school feeding programmes, improve the dissemination of nutrition information and address the growing problem of overweight in the adult population. They also reveal significant deficiencies in the intake of essential foods among young people, indicating the need for more effective and accessible nutrition education.

The implementation of such a project in Guayaquil, based on these studies, will allow for the development of well-informed strategies tailored to local needs. By addressing the specific challenges identified in each age group, the project will not only improve the diet and health of residents, but also ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of interventions. In this way, a healthier and more equitable food environment can be fostered, contributing significantly to the overall well-being of the community.

A healthier and more equitable food environment can be fostered, contributing significantly to the overall well-being of the community. Furthermore, this holistic approach to nutritional health not only benefits young people in the present, but also lays the foundation for a healthier and more resilient future, where prevention and self-care are key elements in promoting public health.

In conclusion, the study focuses specifically on young people aged 17 years and older, taking into account that this is a group that is at a crucial stage of development and making autonomous decisions about their diet. By focusing on this segment, the aim is not only to correct current dietary deficiencies, but also to instil healthy eating habits that will last throughout adulthood. This approach is essential to prevent long-term health problems and to foster a more nutritionally aware and educated generation.

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