

# **A new and inter-ministerial Strategy for the Promotion of Healthy Eating in Portugal**

The Integrated Strategy for the Promotion of Healthy Eating (EIPAS) was published on December 29<sup>th</sup>, 2017, documenting a set of measures, agreed by an inter-ministerial working group reflecting the opinion of the Ministries of Finance, Internal Affairs, Education, Health, Economy, Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development, and Sea. The framework of this Strategy was based on documents from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the European Commission (EC) in the area of nutrition and healthy eating, as well as on the most recent data produced by the National Food Inquiry and other recent studies in the area. The analysis of these data allowed to identify the main nutritional problems of the Portuguese population and to propose some measures to change the situation. It also reflects a public hearing where different stakeholders, including the Food Industry, WHO, FAO and Professional Associations were heard, among other entities.

This working group, led by the Directorate-General of Health (DGS) worked over a year and a half and produced an innovative document reflecting the WHO's declaration of "Health in All Policies". This intends to be a good practice in the field of nutritional policies. In fact, this type of document, formally signed by the different ministries, has never been implemented in Portugal since April 25, 1974. Only in 1989, and through the National Council of Food and Nutrition (CNAN) a similar proposal was made, but that never came to originate a formal and political document. EIPAS will work in a coordinated manner with the National Programme for the Promotion of Healthy Eating (PNPAS) run by the Directorate-General of Health.

## **The new strategy proposes goals in 4 different areas (Axis):**

**Axis 1:** To modify the environment where people choose and buy food by modifying the availability of food in certain physical spaces and promoting the reformulation of certain categories of food.

The aim of this strategic axis is to make "healthy choices easier in terms of price, access and attractiveness, promoting the improvement of the availability and composition of foods, particularly in their salt, sugar, and trans fatty acids contents. "

**To achieve this goal, the group proposes the following:**

- 1** – To monitor salt content in the following food categories: bread and breakfast cereals, meat and meat products (minced meat - meat product), ready-to-eat meals, potatoes fries and other snacks, sauces, ready-to-eat soups, cheeses, preserved fish and restaurant meals (soup and main course);
- 2** – To monitor the sugar content in the following food categories: non-alcoholic beverages, dairy products, cookies and sweet desserts, pastries, breakfast cereals, ready-to-eat meals, sauces, ice cream and canned fruit;
- 3** – To monitor trans fatty acids content in the following food categories: biscuits, pastries, potato fries, breakfast cereals, chocolate spreads and vegetable spreads.

**Axis 2:** To improve the quality and accessibility of information available to consumers to inform and empower citizens for healthy food choices.

The aim of this strategic axis is to identify activities / initiatives that facilitate access by the citizen to quality information for an informed choice. There is a lot of information regarding food and diet at the moment, but it is difficult for citizens to distinguish between easy and reliable information provided by independent and credible authorities like the State, that should play an important role in this matter.

**To achieve this goal, the group proposes the following:**

- 1** – To encourage the use of additional nutritional information in food labeling, in order to facilitate consumer's food choices, namely by producing guidelines for the food sector;
- 2** – To encourage the use of information regarding the trans fatty acids content as part of the nutritional information in food labeling;
- 3** – To encourage the adoption of measures by economic operators to restrict the marketing to children of food products high in salt, sugar, fat – namely trans fatty acids – and energy.

**Axis 3:** To promote and develop literacy and autonomy for the exercise of healthy consumer choices.

The aim of this strategic axis is to enable citizens of various levels of literacy to make healthy choices. This is because chronic diseases have a social gradient, being more prevalent in the populations with less education and with a more fragile economic situation. On the other hand, in order for this programmatic axis to succeed, it is necessary to involve and train professionals other than health professionals, to promote healthy eating habits in the populations with whom they work, and to train them with knowledge and skills for these interventions.

**To achieve this goal, the group proposes the following:**

**1** – To promote the food literacy of pregnant women and parents about the importance of healthy eating in the first 1000 days of life;

**2** – To promote strategies of food education in the school environment, in particular through the promotion of the Mediterranean Diet, preparation and cooking of food and better knowledge of the food production cycle;

**3** – To increase citizens' awareness of the concept of Mediterranean Diet and how to favor healthy choices from this food model.

**Axis 4:** To promote innovation and entrepreneurship focused on the area of promotion of healthy eating.

The aim of this strategic axis is to identify initiatives that use innovation and technological development to change knowledge, attitudes and behaviors towards healthy eating, taking advantage of the entrepreneurial capacity of the Portuguese economy and small scale companies.

Through this Ministry Order, it is intended to ensure that the EIPAS measures are implemented by the various services and agencies of the State's Administration, which are competent according to their respective areas of activity and under the guidance of their respective authority.

It is also intended that the monitoring of the implementation of the EIPAS can be carried out by the Interministerial Working Group, created through the Deliberation of the Council of Ministers no. 334/2016, of September 15th, through the semiannual presentation of reports of progress.

**To achieve this goal, the group proposes the following:**

- 1** – To build an online information portal about fish and its nutritional value, providing interactive materials for teaching, and to support the presence of fish in school meals;
- 2** – To promote the use of digital media in public institutions (e.g. waiting rooms, service desks) for the promotion of healthy eating;
- 3** – To propose alignment of funding priorities for research in state laboratories and funding agencies with the national priorities in the area of promotion of healthy eating.