

A COMPARATIVE EVALUATION OF DIETARY PATTERNS AND NUTRIENT INTAKES OF
ITALIAN MIGRANT AND AUSTRALIAN ADOLESCENTS IN SYDNEY

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Although Italians are reported to be the largest non-British migrant group in Australia (Copell 1981), very few studies, except in Western Australia (Margetts et al. 1981), have been conducted examining the dietary patterns and nutrient intakes of Italian migrant adolescents, compared with Australian adolescents living in the same community. This study was designed to identify differences in food habits between Italian migrant and Australian adolescents.

A 7-day dietary survey of 73 adolescent high school students of Italian migrant descent living in the western metropolitan area of Sydney was conducted during spring, 1982 and compared, using a computer analysis, with that of a similar group of 30 Australian adolescents. Demographic data including Italian language proficiency, visits to Italy and parental birthplace were collected. Additionally, food frequency data examining the consumption of selected foods commonly characterised as Italian were obtained.

Demographic data indicated that all of the parents of the Italian descent adolescents were born in Italy with 10% of the adolescents being born in Italy; 95% spoke Italian and 63% had visited Italy. The Italian adolescent sample was dominated by females, 80%, while the Australian adolescent sample was more equally divided, 53% females and 47% males; mean age for all groups was 14.2 ± 1.4 years.

Food frequency data showed that a large number of foodstuffs were consumed at least weekly by 80% of both populations; such foods were bread, milk, butter and/or margarine, eggs, poultry, tomatoes and apples. Foods frequently consumed by the Italian adolescents but not by their Australian counterparts included Italian pastas, Italian cheeses, olive oil, veal, salami, aniseed, artichoke, egg plant and olives while rice, lamb, beef and green beans were eaten more often by the Australian adolescents.

Computer analysis of the dietary records indicated that the Italian adolescents tended to have lower intakes of most nutrients and were at risk, on the basis of recommended dietary allowances (Stanton 1983), in iodine and energy nutriture. Australian adolescents generally were not at risk, with the exception of folic acid in the females. Additionally, vitamin supplementation was practised by twice as many Australians (27%) as Italians (12%).

In conclusion, this study indicated that while Italian migrant adolescents' eating patterns are much higher in their traditional foodstuffs than Australian adolescents living in the same community, nutrient intakes were generally adequate. Further studies to ascertain the rate of dietary change in migrants and its effects, as well as 'dual rolism' (Borrie 1954) are warranted.

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