



Welcome to the Erasmus Plus project BERNICA, which aims to build educational and research capacity in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan in Nutrition and Dietetics through the training of teaching staff and the development and implementation of educational modules at undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate levels in 8 medical universities in Central Asia.

Project Rationale

The BERNICA project aims to enhance the educational and research capacities in the Central Asian region to promote healthy nutritional habits and improve the population's health. Ten Central Asian medical universities, with the support of two European universities, will develop local expertise in creating innovative curricula in Nutrition & Dietetics in alignment with Bologna principles and ENQA standards through a series of training sessions. Partner countries' universities will design forward-thinking courses and modules with innovative learning approaches tailored to various audiences, including undergraduate and graduate students, practicing medical doctors, and nurses. European partners will share their knowledge and best practices to enhance the research and innovation capabilities of the target universities in this field. The successful completion of the project activities will lead to the development of regional and international networks through collaborative initiatives and the exchange of best practices in education, research, and practice in Nutrition & Dietetics.

Goal

Fostering educational and research capacities of Central Asian region in promotion of healthy dietary habits in order to improve health of the population.

Specific Objectives

1. Building local expertise in the development and running innovative curriculum in Nutrition & Dietetics in line with Bologna principles and ESG standards
2. Increasing research capacities of CA universities in Nutrition & Dietetics.
3. Promotion of the use of innovative teaching and research techniques in Nutrition & Dietetics, including digital applications
4. Fostering regional and international network through joint initiatives, and sharing of good practices in education, research and practice in Nutrition & Dietetics

Kick-off meeting BERNICA



The kick-off meeting for the BERNICA project took place on March 15-16, 2023, at Asfendiyarov Kazakh National Medical University in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The meeting was exceptionally successful and productive. Participants from 8 universities in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, as well as FH JOANNEUM Gesellschaft MBH in Graz, Austria, and Istanbul Medipol Universitesi in Istanbul, Turkey, were warmly welcomed, creating a comfortable and friendly atmosphere. The organization of the meeting was top-notch, considering all the details and participants' needs. Additionally, the meeting's location in Almaty added a special charm and appeal to the event. The introduction at the kick-off meeting proceeded smoothly, fostering a favorable environment for collaboration and work. Participants gladly introduced themselves and their professional achievements, which facilitated the establishment of mutual trust and understanding. The meeting provided an excellent opportunity to become acquainted with various experts and specialists. Furthermore, the participants were introduced to the BERNICA project with its interesting and promising ideas, plans, and development strategies. Getting to know the BERNICA project marked an important step in establishing a strong partnership and mutually beneficial cooperation.

During the kick-off meeting, particular attention was given to the significance and possibilities of online learning. The tools and platforms to be used for conducting educational sessions and facilitating interaction among project participants in an online format were discussed. Key stages and a schedule for online learning were also determined. The agenda of the kick-off meeting included discussions about the summer school in Issyk-Kul.

The goals and expectations of the summer school were outlined, and logistics, accommodation, and the program of the event were discussed. Such a gathering provides an opportunity for closer interaction and the exchange of knowledge and experience among project participants. Within the framework of the kick-off meeting, plans for exploratory visits to universities were also discussed.

The project participants deliberated on the goals and objectives of such visits and identified a list of universities to be visited. Exploratory visits offer an opportunity for sharing best practices, establishing partnerships, and expanding professional networks.



20th anniversary of the International Higher School of Medicine (IHSM)

The International Higher School of Medicine (IHSM) established in 2003 and this year celebrating 20th anniversary. The International Higher School of Medicine has been a leader in medical education for the past 20 years. With a strong focus on international collaboration, IHSM has implemented six major international projects and established 60 cooperation agreements with partner universities. Its academic mobility rate stands at an impressive 10%. Currently, IHSM boasts a diverse student body of over 4,000 students hailing from 14 different countries, including Algeria, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bahrain, India, Yemen, Korea, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Syria, Thailand, UK, and USA. The school's commitment to international standards is evident through its registration with esteemed organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), Association of Medical Schools in Europe (AMSE), and World Directory of Medical Schools (WDOMS). The IHSM actively participates in the Erasmus program, showcasing its dedication to international academic exchange. Notably, the school successfully presented the 2016-2021 Credit Mobility project. Offering a comprehensive range of academic programs, IHSM provides opportunities for students at various stages of their medical education. These programs include General Medicine, six residency programs, eight postgraduate programs, one master's program, and one doctoral program. To support its academic endeavors, IHSM maintains several academic and administrative buildings, including the IHSM Central Administrative Office and facilities at the Issyk-Kul Campus in Cholpon-Ata. The "VEDANTA-Pathology" academic and clinical complex of the Pathology Department serves as a notable resource.



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News

Opting for olive oil could boost brain health

Regular olive oil consumption associated with 28% lower risk of fatal dementia

Reports and Proceedings

AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR NUTRITION



Anne-Julie Tessier

RD, PhD, postdoctoral fellow at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health

A new study suggests that incorporating olive oil into your diet could help reduce the risk of dying from dementia. As many countries face rising rates of Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia, the study offers hope that healthy lifestyle factors such as diet can help to prevent or slow the progression of these devastating conditions.

“Our study reinforces dietary guidelines recommending vegetable oils such as olive oil and suggests that these recommendations not only support heart health but potentially brain health, as well,” said Anne-Julie Tessier, RD, PhD, a postdoctoral fellow at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. “Opting for olive oil, a natural product, instead of fats such as margarine and commercial mayonnaise is a safe choice and may reduce the risk of fatal dementia.”

Tessier will present the findings at NUTRITION 2023, the flagship annual meeting of the American Society for Nutrition held July 22–25 in Boston.

Dementia includes a range of conditions in which impairments in thinking or memory affect a person's daily activities.

Alzheimer's, a progressive and fatal disease affecting an estimated 5.7 million Americans, is the most common form of dementia.

The study is the first to investigate the relationship between diet and dementia-related death. Scientists analyzed dietary questionnaires and death records collected from more than 90,000 Americans over three decades, during which 4,749 study participants died from dementia.

The results indicated that people who consumed more than half a tablespoon of olive oil per day had a 28% lower risk of dying from dementia compared with those who never or rarely consumed olive oil. In addition, replacing just one teaspoon of margarine and mayonnaise with the equivalent amount of olive oil per day was associated with an 8-14% lower risk of dying from dementia.

Research suggests that people who regularly use olive oil instead of processed or animal fats tend to have healthier diets overall. However, Tessier noted that the relationship between olive oil and dementia mortality risk in this study was independent of overall diet quality. This may suggest that olive oil has properties that are uniquely beneficial for brain health.

“Some antioxidant compounds in olive oil can cross the blood-brain barrier, potentially having a direct effect on the brain,” said Tessier. “It is also possible that olive oil has an indirect effect on brain health by benefiting cardiovascular health.”

Previous studies have linked higher olive oil intake with a lower risk of heart disease. Incorporating olive oil as part of a Mediterranean dietary pattern has also been shown to help protect against cognitive decline.

Tessier cautioned that the research is observational and does not prove that olive oil is the cause of the reduced risk of fatal dementia. Additional studies such as randomized controlled trials would be needed to confirm the effects and determine the optimal quantity of olive oil to consume in order to reap these benefits. Overall, however, the study aligns with dietary recommendations and bolsters the evidence that using olive oil in place of margarine or mayonnaise can help to support a healthy diet.

Tessier will present this research at 8:13 a.m. EDT on Monday, July 24, during the Nutrition-related Factors in Aging and Chronic Disease Poster Theater Flash Session in the Sheraton Boston, Fairfax (abstract; presentation details).

Please note that abstracts presented at NUTRITION 2023 were evaluated and selected by a committee of experts but have not generally undergone the same peer review process required for publication in a scientific journal. As such, the findings presented should be considered preliminary until a peer-reviewed publication is available.

This release may include updated numbers or data that differ from those in the submitted abstract.

Beta-carotene, the bright orange pigment found in foods like squash, cantaloupe, and carrots—has been commonly used as a supplement for eye health, immune health, and skin health. However, recent research published in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology* found a shocking truth about this pigment. This study looked into the effects of common supplements like omega-3s, magnesium, and beta carotene. Unfortunately, what they found was that supplements made with beta-carotene were actually linked to an increased risk of cardiovascular disease mortality and all-cause mortality. Even though the reasoning behind this discovery is still largely unknown, experts still suggest