

## “Together” to beat unhealthy habits among pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers in six EU cities

The six European cities participating in the “Together” pilot project organised informative events in November 2015 to present the goals and main messages of this new EU-funded initiative. Targeting pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers, “Together” will be implemented between 2015-2016 in Manchester, United Kingdom; Murcia, Spain; Odense & Kolding, Denmark; Prague, Czech Republic, and Varna, Bulgaria, to identify good practices to inspire other cities in Europe to replicate its approach in the future.

One of the main novelties of “Together” is that it will promote being healthy as something more than just a balanced diet and regular physical exercise, or the absence of illness and disease. Instead, it will promote a balance of physical, mental and social wellbeing by strengthening the social bonds between pregnant and breastfeeding women through group activities like yoga classes or cooking workshops.

The project will also make an extra effort to reach young mothers, immigrants and women with lower income, who sometimes struggle to access fresh foods and other healthy lifestyle options.

Each participating city will develop its own activities, depending on the special needs and resources of its community. Local promoting groups - made up of educators, nutritionists, health and social workers like gynaecologists, midwives, obstetricians – will get involved in this community-driven initiative along with NGOs and charities, supermarkets, community centres, gymnasiums, etc. to offer many diverse activities and plenty of easily accessible information.



## Expecting and new mums learnt to plan healthy meals with “Together” in MANCHESTER



The “Together” project was launched in the city of Manchester (UK) with a friendly and joyful event held on 19 November at the Manchester Maternity Unit, in St Mary’s Hospital.

Around 250 pregnant women and breastfeeding mums participated in a series of interactive activities, where they were able to meet and ask health professionals about the smartest eating and exercise recommendations for them and their babies.

Hosted by Claire Lyon, midwife and local coordinator of “Together”, the event included different food-related activities, in which women were invited to plan healthy meals based on the five main groups and the ‘eat well plate’.

With the advice and tips offered by nutritionist Debbie Gibson, breastfeeding counsellor Rebecca Crabtree and psychologist Debbie Smith, participants also learnt to understand food labels and to recognise how much salt and sugar is present in popular commercial snacks.

Lots of fresh fruits were handed out to expectant and new mums throughout the hospital’s Maternity Unit, who were asked to tell the “Together” project’s local team what types of healthy lifestyle activities they would like to enjoy during their pregnancy. Women seemed especially keen to engage with physical and community-based activities, and in particular yoga and aquanatal sessions.

Local coordinator Claire Lyon explained that all the suggestions gathered during the kick-off event will be taken into account, and proposals will be made accordingly to run some of these activities as part of the “Together” Manchester programme in 2016.



## MURCIA celebrated the launch of the project with a full day of activities for 650 women



**Aquagym and yoga sessions, conferences and cooking classes are some of the fun activities organised to celebrate the launch of the “Together” pilot project in Murcia (Spain) on 19 November. Around 650 pregnant women and breastfeeding mums took part in the successful celebration, which took place in different locations across the city in a festive and cheerful atmosphere.**

The day started with special aquagym water sessions and yoga classes for pregnant women in several municipal sport venues, where participants were encouraged to keep active and strengthen their social bonds with other mums while expecting their babies.

The programme of activities, which will continue in Murcia throughout 2016, also included a hands-on workshop at the Verónicas Market, where expecting and breastfeeding mothers from different cultural backgrounds were invited to learn how to buy healthy food and prepare tasty dishes.

The busiest activity of the day was the one held in Santo Domingo Square, where a “Together” stand offered pregnant women the opportunity to detect the foetal heartbeat of their babies and receive advice from midwives on issues such as breastfeeding and healthy eating habits.

The day ended with a conference and panel debate at the Moneo Building with the participation of doctors, midwives and nutrition experts, among others, who explained the goals of this new EU-funded pilot project.

“Eating habits during the preconception period, pregnancy, and the first 1,000 days of life are key for the health of the unborn, and are fundamental in the future physical and intellectual development of the child,” highlighted the Health and Sports City Councillor of Murcia, Felipe Coello.





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## Women in ODENSE learnt the benefits of a healthy lifestyle during and after pregnancy



The official launch of the “Together” project in Odense & Kolding (Denmark) on 19 November gathered a significant group of health professionals and parents at the Odense University Hospital, who welcomed this new EU-funded initiative targeting pregnant and breastfeeding women.

The kick-off event was an opportunity for the participants to share thoughts about “Together” and get information about the activities that will be organised within the project.

Starting January 2016, the local team of “Together” headed by Christina Vinter and Christina Lindhardt will be organising a wide array of activities, from conferences to yoga classes, to educate pregnant women on the importance of a varied and balanced diet and a healthy lifestyle.



“We know that what is healthy for the mother is also healthy for the child. Therefore, it is important that mothers can find inspiration and guidance on how to take care of themselves and give their babies the opportunity to start life under the best possible conditions”, explained Susanne Crawley, Chair for Children and Youth at Odense Municipality.

Beside face-to-face activities, the “Together” team in Odense will make the most of their local Facebook group to share healthy tips and advice with the local community of expecting and breastfeeding mums. Some of the topics that will be covered by doctors and midwives during the duration of the pilot project are: which are the best foods to eat when breastfeeding, how to avoid unnecessary weight gain during pregnancy, and how to get in shape after birth.





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## Actress Sandra Nováková supported the launch of the project in PRAGUE



The launch of the “Together” project in Prague was held on 19 November at the Thomayer Hospital with the participation of a very special ambassador: actress Sandra Nováková. The popular Czech TV star, who is pregnant, contributed with her presence to reinforce the message of this new EU-funded initiative, which aims to promote healthy habits among pregnant women and breastfeeding mums.



During the event, nutritionist Jitka Tomešová highlighted the importance of encouraging pregnant mothers to eat healthily and be active, as during this life stage they are generally more sensitive and eager to change their lifestyle, both for their own benefit and for their babies. She also underlined the problem of alcohol consumption during pregnancy among Czech women.

Until June 2016 “Together” will be organising a wide array of activities in Prague targeting mothers to be, with a special focus on women from vulnerable groups, “as they have more difficulties to access healthy and fresh foods and to access information about healthy habits, healthy lifestyle or appropriate leisure activities,” highlighted Tomešová, who is also the local coordinator of the project.

Actress Sandra Nováková explained how important it is for expecting moms like her to have a healthy lifestyle, learn to breath properly and eat balanced meals. She also revealed that one of her current favourite physical activities is gravity yoga for pregnant women, which she recommended.

The kick-off press conference was attended by representatives of other organisations and institutions involved in “Together”, besides the Thomayer Hospital, including the Prague City Hall, the Foundation 1000 Days, and the Healthy 5 project.

Among other activities, “Together” will organise healthy shopping classes in collaboration with a local supermarket, individual consultations on healthy habits during and after pregnancy, belly dance and cooking sessions for pregnant women.





## “Together” kicked-off in VARNA with a press conference



The “Together” project in Varna (Bulgaria) was officially presented on 19 November at a press conference held at the City Town Hall.

Members of the municipality and health-related professionals attended the informative event, where participants welcomed and highlighted the importance of the involvement of Varna in this pilot project targeting pregnant and breastfeeding woman.

According to Daniela Koleva, a board member of the Alliance of Midwives in Bulgaria and local coordinator of this EU project, pregnant women and nursing mothers in Varna show high rates of smoking and drinking, while almost half of them recognise they do not worry about their weight or try to keep physically active. These are some of the lifestyle habits the “Together” project wants to change in Varna, she remarked, with activities targeting around 500 women, specially young mothers, immigrants and women with lower income.

The programme of “Together” in Varna will include activities from food and shopping workshops to yoga classes and conferences. There will also be a meeting point for expecting and new mums, the “Zen coffee and tea lounge”, opened at the Om Shanti Yoga Club, where many of these activities will take place in the following months.



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