

Obesity and Overweight

Fact Sheet

Obesity and Overweight: an important health issue

- Obesity and overweight are major risks for one's health. It can be linked to various serious health hazards such as diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular diseases
- Prevalence of obesity has strongly increased over the last decade. WHO estimates that globally about 1.6 billion adults are overweight and at least 400 million adults are obese. This figure is predicted to rise to 2.3 billion adults by 2015.¹

Spotlight

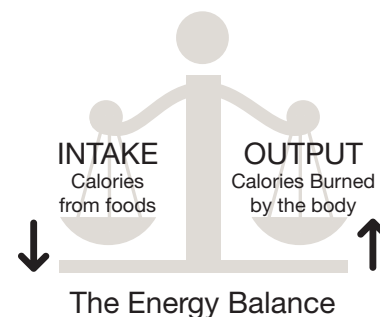
- 1 Obesity is both a highly complex issue for society and a costly debilitating lifestyle disease
- 2 The key actions required of public institutions should be educating and motivating people to balance healthy eating with regular physical activity
- 3 ESA members are committed to helping consumers make better informed food choices by providing nutritionally improved products and simple and clear on-pack labelling
- 4 Savoury snack products contribute only a tiny amount (less than 3%) to overall energy intakes – over 97% comes from other foodstuffs

What is Obesity and Overweight?

- Obesity is often defined simply as a condition of abnormal or excessive fat accumulation in the fat tissues (adipose) of the body leading to health hazards. The underlying cause is a positive energy balance leading to weight gain.¹
- Body weight is the result a multitude of factors such as the degree of physical activity, dietary habits, socio-economic factors, metabolism, and genetic predisposition.²
- The so called body Mass Index (BMI) is generally used by doctors and health professionals to measure the relationship between weight and height: It is defined as weight in kg divided by the square of the height in meters (kg/m²). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines "overweight" as a BMI equal to or more than 25, and "obesity" as a BMI equal to or more than 30.

Body Mass Index (kg/m ²)		Example: person of 1.70m height	Example: person of 1.90m height
< 18.5	Underweight	> 54 kg	> 67 kg
18.5 - 25	Healthy Weight	54 - 72 kg	67 - 90 kg
25 - 30	Overweight	73 - 87 kg	91 - 109 kg
> 30	Obese	> 87 kg	> 109 kg

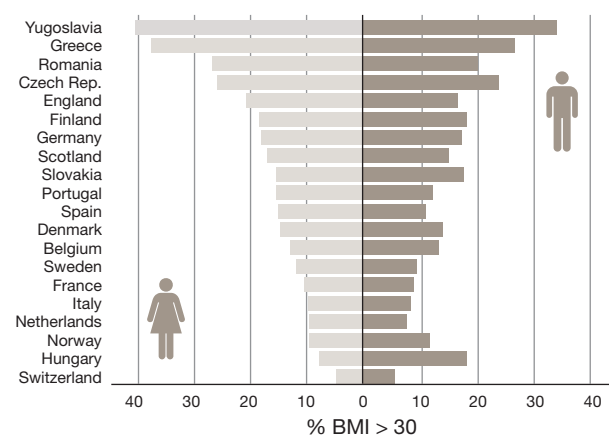
- In order to maintain one's weight, the amount of calories burned should equal the amount of calories consumed. The body burns calories for everyday functions such as breathing, digestion, and routine daily activities as well as for all other physical activity.
- But many people eat more calories than they burn each day. A good way to burn off extra calories and prevent weight gain is through leisure-time physical activity.
- When calories consumed are greater than calories used, weight gain results:



Obesity in Europe – Some Figures

- Prevalence of obesity has strongly increased in the majority of European countries in the last decade and currently ranges from 10%-27% for men and 10%-38% for women.³
- According to the WHO, men have higher rates of overweight, while women have higher rates of obesity - this is due to physiological differences between men and women.⁴
- Prevalence in adults (BMI > 30):

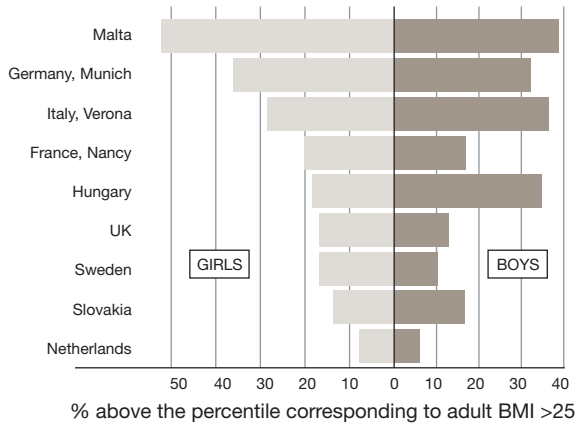
Male and female obesity levels in selected European countries



Collated by the IOTF from recent surveys

- Prevalence in children (corresponding to adult BMI > 25):

Overweight and obese 10-year olds in selected European countries



Collated by the IOTF from recent surveys

- In the EU, about 14 million children are overweight including 3 million obese, affecting 1 in 4 children.⁵
- Overweight prevalence for children is 10%-20% in Northern Europe and 20-35% in Southern Europe.⁶

Consequences and Impacts

For the human body

- Obesity poses a major risk for serious diet-related non-communicable diseases, including:
 - diabetes mellitus (type 2 diabetes)
 - musculoskeletal disorders – especially osteoarthritis
 - cardiovascular diseases
 - hypertension and strokes
 - certain forms of cancer
 - psychological problems

For the whole society

- Estimates suggest that between 2%-7% of the total health care costs in Western countries are attributable to obesity, for example 3-4% in the Netherlands and 2% in France.⁷
- The indirect costs of obesity that arise from for example - loss of wages and productivity - would raise the total cost of obesity to even higher amounts.

Why is Obesity on the Rise?

- Over the past 25 years fat intake in Europe has fallen, and energy intakes have been markedly reduced for most people. Yet over the same period of time overweight and obesity has risen sharply, clearly indicating that factors other than dietary fat and calorie intake, are implicated. It is generally recognized that the decline in physical activity levels has undoubtedly played a major part in the increased prevalence of obesity.⁸
- “The current obesity pandemic reflects the profound changes to society over the past 20-30 years that have created an environment that

promotes a sedentary lifestyle and the consumption of a high fat, energy dense diet” (International Obesity Task Force - IOTF).

- Among the reasons for childhood obesity identified by IOTF are the increase in use of motorized transport, e.g. to school, less opportunities for recreational physical activity and increased sedentary recreation, i.e. multiple TV channels available around the clock, an increased frequency of eating occasions as well as more frequent purchasing opportunities, the availability of greater quantities and varieties of energy dense foods, larger portions of food offering better ‘value’ for money and rising use of soft drinks to replace water (e.g. in schools).¹⁰
- Research has shown that obese children do not consume more snack foods (sweets and savoury snacks) than their normal weight counterparts. Intake of these foods is not an important independent determinant of weight gain among children and adolescents.⁹

What is the Solution?

Who is Responsible for Promoting Healthier Lifestyle?

- Overweight and obesity, as well as their related chronic diseases, are preventable. However, this requires an integrated, multi-stakeholder, population based approach, including support for healthy diets and regular physical activity. Consumers expect responses from policymakers and food-operators.
- To tackle the obesity problem, people at risk of becoming overweight must be encouraged to adopt a healthier lifestyle, including a healthy diet and regular physical exercise. For the latter WHO recommends at least 30 minutes of regular, moderate-intensity activity on most days. More activity may be required for weight control. (WHO recommendations at www.who.int)

The Savory Snacks Industry Commitments

- In the UK, which is the biggest market in Europe, consumption of savoury snacks accounts for less than 3% of overall average dietary intake of fat and less than 3% of calories.¹² However, as part of the food industry the savoury snacks sector recognises that it has a role to play in helping to find solutions to the problem of obesity and in promoting healthy diets and active lifestyles.
- This includes the provision of voluntary nutrition information and of guideline daily amounts (GDAs) that put this information into perspective to help consumers understand nutrition information and to enable them to make informed choices.
- The industry is also actively involved in product reformulation, offering healthier alternatives and looking into ways to improve the nutritional profile of its products, while maintaining consumer acceptability.

References

- ¹ Obesity and overweight, in: EUFIC The Basics 06/2006.
- ² Nutrition & Physical activity, National (US) Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion.
- ³ International Obesity Taskforce EU Platform Briefing Paper, International Obesity Taskforce, 2005, p. 5.
- ⁴ International Obesity Taskforce, Donald B. Brown, Research Chair on Obesity.
- ⁵ International Obesity Taskforce, Childhood Obesity Report, May 2004.
- ⁶ See above.
- ⁷ Obesity and overweight, in: EUFIC The Basics 06/2006.
- ⁸ Fats, in: EUFIC Basics 6/2006.
- ⁹ Snack food intake does not predict weight change among children and adolescents, International Journal of Obesity (2004)28, 1210-1216.
- ¹⁰ The International Association for the Study of Obesity, obesity reviews 5 (Suppl. 1), 4-85, 2004.
- ¹¹ Dr. Kennedy, News & Highlights, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.
- ¹² UK National Diet and Nutrition Survey: Adults aged 19-64, Vol. 2, 2003, p. 71/19.