



Recommendation 3 for Policy-makers on Overweight and obesity

- **Implement fiscal policies:**
 - Increase taxes and prices of foods high in sugars, fat or salt, including processed meat, and sugar-sweetened beverages.
 - Lower taxes and prices of whole-grain products, vegetables, legumes, and fruit.
- **Make the healthy choice the easiest – most affordable, accessible and available – option in all settings:**
 - Increase the availability, visibility, and affordability of whole-grain products, vegetables, legumes, and fruit.
 - Remove snacks high in sugars, fat, or salt and sweetened beverages from vending machines and other locations. Make the sugar-free option the default option for hot beverages in vending machines.
 - Provide fresh filtered tap water in all settings.
- **Implement procurement policies with mandatory standards that limit foods high in sugars, fat, or salt, including processed meat, and sugar-sweetened beverages in all settings. Specify upper limits for total daily energy from sugars and an upper limit of sodium intake per meal.**
- **Ban or restrict marketing, advertising, and promotion of foods high in sugars, fat, or salt, especially to children.**
- **Introduce and promote weight management interventions that are accessible and affordable for all citizens.**
- **Agree upon and implement an effective European Union (EU)-wide front-of-pack nutrition labelling scheme that is understood by all consumers.**
- **Update and promote national food-based dietary guidelines.**
- **Update curricula to include nutritional education classes across the EU.**
- **Complementing the above policy measures, implement regular public health campaigns to raise awareness of the association of excess body weight with cancer risk and the importance of prevention of overweight and obesity.**

Executive summary

In 2019, overweight and obesity affected more than half of all adults and 1 in 3 children in the EU and directly accounted for more than 583 000 all-cause deaths and more than 14 million disability-adjusted life years¹ in the EU. Between 2014 and 2019, the prevalence of overweight increased in almost all EU Member States. In 2016, overweight and obesity were estimated to cost EU Member States more than €70 billion per year in health-care costs and lost productivity, because obesity also damages school performance and workforce productivity. It is predicted that overweight alone will reduce gross domestic product by 3.3% on average between 2023 and 2050.

Overweight and obesity have major implications for health. Excess body weight and obesity, as well as excess body fat, have been linked to at least 13 cancer types and several other noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), including cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and coronary heart diseases, and an overall reduction in life expectancy.

Overweight and obesity are major policy concerns for many EU Member States, and a series of policies have been proposed and implemented by Member States to tackle the growing health and economic burden of overweight and obesity. Government action focused on the reduction of overweight and obesity, through policies and partnerships that facilitate an integrated approach to supportive environments that make the healthy choice the easiest choice across all settings, is essential to reduce the associated cancer risks and burden. This policy brief describes international policies and guidelines that support policy-makers and other stakeholders to implement the European Code Against Cancer, 5th edition (ECAC5) policy recommendation to address the cancer burden caused by excess body weight.

¹ One disability-adjusted life year (DALY) equals the loss of the equivalent of one year of full health.



Key policy actions to reduce overweight and obesity

- **Implement fiscal policies:**
 - Increase taxes and prices of foods high in sugar, fat, or salt, including processed meat, and sugar-sweetened beverages.
There is evidence that taxes on sugar sweetened beverages decrease consumption and encourage companies to reformulate products.
 - Lower taxes and prices of whole-grain products, vegetables, legumes, and fruits.
Such measures would reduce the price of such products and potentially promote their consumption which would decrease the risk for cancer.
- **Make the healthy choice the easiest – most affordable, accessible, and available – option in all settings:**
 - Increase the availability, visibility and affordability of whole-grain products, vegetables, legumes and fruit.
 - Remove snacks high in sugar, fat, or salt and sweetened beverages from vending machines. Make the sugar-free option the default option for hot beverages in vending machines.
 - Increase the availability, visibility, and affordability of whole-grain products, vegetables, and fruits. Provide fresh filtered tap water in all settings.
 - Develop mandatory food standards for schools and early education settings that are in line with dietary guidelines.
 - Introduce healthy food standards in other settings, such as workplace canteens, to promote healthier food habits by using incentives.
- **Implement procurement policies in public catering services, such as school canteens, with mandatory standards that limit or ban foods high in sugar, fat, or salt, including processed meat, and sugar-sweetened beverages in all settings. Specify upper limits for total daily energy from sugars and an upper limit of sodium intake per meal.**
- **Reduce and control marketing of foods high in sugar, fat, or salt.**
 - Marketing of unhealthy foods is widespread and often targets the most vulnerable communities and groups, including children and adolescents. Restrictions on marketing should protect all those aged 19 years and under and ensure that they include marketing restrictions in and around schools. They should apply to advertising on television and digital platforms, as well as broader types of marketing, such as sponsorship.
- **Introduce and promote weight management interventions that are accessible and affordable for all citizens.**

- Carefully designed weight management interventions should be offered in primary health-care settings and in community care for all population groups.
- **Agree upon and implement an effective EU-wide front-of-pack nutrition labelling scheme that is easily understood by all population groups regardless of the literacy and numerical skills**
- **Regularly update and promote national food-based dietary guidelines.**
- **Introduce mandatory nutrition education classes across the EU.**
 - Mandatory nutrition education should be included in school curricula in both primary and secondary schools.
- **Implement public health campaigns to raise awareness of the association of excess body weight with cancer risk and the importance of prevention of overweight and obesity.**
 - Launch large-scale, evidence-based public health campaigns to inform citizens about the link between body weight and the ways in which they can reduce the risk of cancer. These campaigns should use social media and audiovisual media to reach and engage a large audience, engage healthcare professionals, and be understandable by all citizens.

Risk of cancer

- It is predicted that obesity will overtake smoking and become the leading cause of cancer in the next decades.
- There is strong evidence that excess body weight is a cause of at least 13 types of cancer. These include cancers of the mouth, pharynx and larynx, oesophagus (adenocarcinoma), stomach (cardia), pancreas, gallbladder, liver, colorectum, breast (postmenopausal), ovary, endometrium, prostate (advanced), and kidney.
- Higher body weight early in life, and early onset and longer duration of overweight and obesity, can increase the risk of certain cancer types later in life; this makes it important to establish a healthy weight in childhood and adolescence.

Monitoring progress

No single intervention is sufficient to tackle the challenge of overweight and obesity. A comprehensive package of interventions is required, as presented above. The greatest impact will be achieved when population-wide interventions, such as fiscal measures, are combined with targeted approaches to reach vulnerable and at-risk populations.

Monitoring the progress of the implemented policies is crucial to evaluate their implementation and effectiveness and to ensure that these policies receive appropriate budgeting and finance when the policy is designed. Appropriate enforcement mechanisms for regulatory policies are key. Voluntary measures, such as agreements with industry about limiting the marketing of unhealthy foods or reformulating food products, have been shown to be ineffective in the absence of stronger enforcement mechanisms.

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