



Recommendation 5 for Policy-makers on Diet

- **Implement fiscal policies:**
 - Increase taxes and prices of processed meat.
 - Lower taxes and prices of whole-grain products, vegetables, and fruit.
- **Make the healthy choice the easiest – most affordable, accessible, and available – option in all settings:**
 - Implement procurement policies with mandatory standards that limit red and processed meat in all settings.
 - Increase the availability, visibility, and affordability of whole-grain products, vegetables, fruit and legumes.
 - Set mandatory standards that limit or ban foods high in sugar, fat, or salt.
- **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 importance of healthy nutrition in the prevention of cancer.**

Executive summary

Despite differences in food group intake and dietary patterns between different European populations, the overall consumption of fruits and vegetables remains low. In 2019, only 1 in 8 people in the EU ate the recommended five or more portions of fruits and vegetables per day. Red meat consumption is twice the recommended 350–500 grams per week. In 16 of the 27 EU Member States, the average intake of whole grains is below 50 grams per day, which is not enough dietary fibre.

Dietary habits have been associated with the risk of cancer, and some food groups increase the risk of some types of cancer, whereas others can help to prevent cancer. Unhealthy diets have also been linked to several noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), such as cardiovascular diseases and diabetes.

Given the importance of diet for the risk of cancer and other NCDs, and the fact that dietary recommendations are not met across the EU, government action is essential to develop and implement policies to promote healthier eating habits and healthier food environments. Policies and practices must be reoriented to make the healthy choice the easiest option in all settings. Integrated approaches that include fiscal policies, addressing the availability of healthy foods, and education and community involvement, are particularly important. 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 unhealthy diets.

Key policy actions to promote a healthy diet

- **Implement fiscal policies:**
 - Increase taxes on and prices of processed meat.
 - Lower taxes on and prices of whole-grain products, vegetables, and fruit.

Increasing the taxes on and prices of unhealthy products, such as processed meat, are tools to prevent their consumption. Lowering the prices of healthier products and making these more affordable increases their availability and affordability, especially to people with lower incomes, thereby decreasing health inequalities.

- **Make the healthy choice the easiest – most affordable, accessible, and available – option in all settings:**

- Reduce the availability of processed meat.
- Increase the availability, visibility, and affordability of whole-grain products, vegetables, and fruits.
- Set mandatory standards that limit or ban foods high in sugar, fat, or salt.

These measures promote healthy eating environments by removing unhealthy products or making them less available in settings such as schools, public institutions and workplace canteens, and promoting healthier food products. ...

- **Agree upon and implement an effective EU-wide front-of-pack nutrition labelling scheme that is understood by all consumers.**
 - Introducing front-of-pack nutrition labelling has positive effects on informing the public about the nutritional characteristics of food products. This type of labelling should be evidence-based and be understood by all consumers, including those with low literacy and numeracy skills and those with limited nutritional knowledge, to assist everyone to make healthier choices.
- **Update and promote national food-based dietary guidelines.**
 - Food-based dietary guidelines should be updated regularly based on the latest scientific evidence. The updated guidelines should be publicized and communicated to the population to promote healthier nutritional habits, especially to those population groups who are less informed about nutrition.
- **Introduce mandatory nutrition education classes across the EU.**
 - Implementing nutrition education and counselling in educational settings, from preschool to higher education, significantly improves the nutrition and food literacy of the population and increases compliance with healthier nutritional habits.
- **Implement public health campaigns to raise awareness of the importance of healthy nutrition in the prevention of cancer.**
 - Launch large-scale, evidence-based public health campaigns to inform citizens of the link between healthy diets and the ways in which they can reduce their risk of developing 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, including the most vulnerable.

Risk of cancer

- Diet plays a significant role in cancer prevention; certain foods increase or decrease cancer risk.
- Diets rich in whole grains, non-starchy vegetables, legumes, and fruits contribute to reducing the risk of cancer,
- Consuming red and processed meat increases the risk of colorectal cancer.
- There is strong evidence of a protective link between eating non-starchy vegetables and fruits and aerodigestive cancers, including cancers of the mouth, pharynx and larynx, nasopharynx, oesophagus (squamous cell carcinoma and adenocarcinoma), lung, stomach, and colorectum.



Monitoring progress

EU Member States should collect information on the population's dietary habits and health to establish a comprehensive EU-wide system to monitor diet and its impact on cancer incidence. These data can help policy-makers make informed decisions and adjust their policy strategies. Policy-makers should conduct regular evaluations of public health initiatives to assess their effectiveness in changing the dietary behaviours of the population.

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