

Fact Sheet: Obesity Prevention and Nutrition

Prevalence of overweight and obesity

- ✓ The rate of overweight and obesity has almost doubled amongst Australian adults over the last 20 years.
- ✓ 67% of Australian men and 52% of Australian women are overweight or obese
- ✓ It is estimated that 20-25% of Australian children are overweight or obese. The rate of childhood overweight and obesity doubled in the 10 years to 1995.

Health consequences of overweight and obesity

The health consequences of obesity include cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, hypertension, musculoskeletal problems and some cancers.

In children, overweight and obesity can also lead to psychosocial problems such as of poor self-esteem, depression and social isolation.

The cost of overweight and obesity

The most recent estimate of the costs of obesity cited by the Commonwealth Department is in the range \$680 million to \$1.239 billion. Prior to this the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the Centre for Health Program Evaluation estimated that the *direct* cost of obesity was around 2% of Australia's total health care costs. This figure is considered conservative as it does not include indirect costs such as absenteeism and lost production.

Energy in versus energy out

In most cases overweight and obesity occurs when, over an extended period of time, the amount of energy (calories or kilojoules) consumed in food and drinks exceeds the amount of energy that the body uses up during exercise and general day-to-day activity.

Regular physical activity is vital in preventing weight gain. But a healthy diet is just as important. There is an array of healthy foods available to consumers (fresh fruits and vegetables, lean meat and fish, low fat dairy products and wholegrain breads). There are also a lot of unhealthy highly processed foods and drinks such as sugary breakfast cereals, sugary, fatty and salty snack foods and fast foods. These foods often appeal to our taste buds and our need to eat on the run. Eaten in moderation they are unlikely to cause obesity.



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Reducing obesity

Individuals, including parents, have a vital role to play in preventing overweight and obesity, but governments and the food and marketing industry must also play their part in ensuring that it is easy for consumers to make healthy choices.

If Governments are serious about tackling the obesity issue then they need to address both sides of the obesity equation. Healthy lifestyle campaigns are relatively easy to implement but may have limited impact. Governments must also consider the more controversial approaches that make it easier for consumers to make healthy food choices.

ACA would like to see:

- ✓ manufacturers and retailers reduce the levels of fat, salt and sugar in foods
- ✓ a greater range of healthy snacks and meals (those lower in kilojoules, saturated fat, total fat, sugar and salt)
- ✓ smaller serving sizes for manufactured single serve products and meals
- ✓ a ban on advertising unhealthy foods during the hours that children watch television
- ✓ food labels that allow consumers to make informed, healthy choices but do not mislead consumers about the health benefits of individual foods