

Commission: Health Council
Subject: Childhood Overweight and Obesity
Writer: Bulgaria

Over the last decades, overweight and obesity's rates have globally and drastically increased. In children, they have grown by 31.25%, going from 32 million obese children in 1990 to over 42 million in 2013. If present tendencies persist, the number of overweight or obese children is estimated to be around 70 million by 2025. As for adults, the percentage of overweight reached 39% in 2014 (1.9 billion people) and 13% of adults (600 million people) were confirmed to suffer from obesity.

Although the problem is said to be a high-income countries' problem, it has now unfortunately become a global issue as most of the world's population lives in countries where the consequences of obesity and overweight cause more victims than underweight. Furthermore, middle as well as low-income countries must now fight a doubled-faced burden of nutritional diseases, as it is not unusual to find undernutrition and obesity coexisting in the same country or even under the same household.

It would be relevant to note that it is difficult to measure these two nutritional disorders in children as infants and adolescents experience an important number of psychological changes all along their growth. For instance, there exist 2 different age groups (from 0 to 5 and 6 to 19) and even 2 different reference standards (the World Health Organisation's and the International Obesity Track Force's) to consult when measuring overweight and obesity.

In relation to these standards, a survey conducted on 4360 Bulgarian school-children aged 6-18 years, showed the difference between both reference standards (WHO's and IOTF's) when it comes to the measurement of the illnesses. Despite these differences, both agreed on a high prevalence of obesity and overweight among the Bulgarian school-children. In fact, the incidence of prevalence of both illnesses studied was higher than 5% (which is the accepted limit).

In addition to this, the Bulgarian population has seen its standardized death rates for cardiovascular diseases (for individuals of both sexes between the age of 0 and 64) become the highest of the EU, which could be related to the growth in the mean BMI (Body Mass Index) in Bulgaria up to 26.7 kg/m² (overweight), given that overweight and obesity in children can cause cardiovascular diseases to develop at a younger age, and moreover, obese children are very likely to grow into obese adults.

The Bulgarian government is conscious of the over-nutrition state of its population and has taken the correct steps to eradicate the illness from its root. Since physical and social environmental factors, combined with physical activity and the energy balance, have proved determining to the weight status of the individuals, our country has put several programmes in motion to introduce physical activity into the habits of our children and youngsters. This way she aims to reduce children overweight and obesity, knowing that reducing obesity in children is highly likely to reduce the illness among adults as well. Consequently, Bulgaria has adopted a large number of national policies to promote physical activity since 2006 calling up on the different ministries concerned.

The Bulgarian nation has also accomplished an action plan involving the food industry and non-governmental organizations to boost a healthier lifestyle, and so forth enhance the health of our population through nutrition.

Bulgaria, in her regional and global partnerships, is aware of the dangers overweight represents for health, not to mention the difficulty encountered in reducing it as overweight could easily lead to obesity, and obese children are likely to turn into obese adults. However, both problems have one same solution: preventing the illness at the youngest age. In Bulgaria this means consciousness.

Our government has realised that any change of habits must come from the individuals themselves, and has therefore concluded that the best way to stimulate these changes is by constantly making health campaigns to raise awareness about the illness and how to prevent it.

This way our country aims to reduce the general (not only childhood's) overweight and obesity rates by 10%, in addition to the global nutrition target set by the WHO aiming to stop the raise in childhood overweight by 2005.