

EG on Non-Communicable Diseases related to Lifestyles and Social and Work Environments NCD EG
Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Wellbeing (NDPHS)
e-mail: m.vienonen@kolumbus.fi
GSM: +358-50-442 1877

PREVENTION OF OVER-WEIGHT AND OBESITY AMONG SCHOOLCHILDREN (ages 7-15)

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Child and adolescent health; nutrition; physical activity; public health epidemiology; disease prevention, and health promotion.

Food and nutrition plays a hugely important role in causing and preventing many diseases. In Northern Dimension Area cardio-vascular diseases are linked with too much animal fat and salt and too little fruit and vegetables in the diets. Yet, some countries can show excellent results through population based dietary changes, which encourages the project to facilitate action in countries still lagging behind. A common nutritional danger is the intake of more food than we need, leading first into overweight and if the imbalance continues into obesity and eventually in adulthood to type-2 diabetes, hypertension, arthrosis and many other complications, loss of quality of life and premature disability and death. Overweight and obesity, lack of physical activity, low fruit and vegetable intake, high cholesterol and blood glucose is a combination of interlinked problems, which competes on the highest ranking position among public health threats with alcohol and tobacco in Northern Dimension countries¹.

The roots of nutritional disturbances are complex and multi-factorial. Much new knowledge has been found through recent research results. Overweight and obesity can be understood as an epidemic, although clear genetic predisposition also exists. Daughters of mothers who are obese are more often also overweight and sons of fathers who are obese behave the same. Children who sleep too little become more easily overweight. There are clear links with overweight and other eating disturbances like bulimia and anorexia. There is also more knowledge of the high importance of physical activity in helping to prevent overweight among children and adults. Behavioral eating and TV-watching patterns play an important role.

Interventions in childhood to prevent overweight and obesity in developing have been successfully implemented through several pilot projects in Northern Dimension area. These already evidence based methods developed by WHO and EU can be used with a specific objective to make them penetrate the whole health, educational and social system, not just in

-
- ¹ Action plan for implementation of the European Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases 2012-2016 (<http://www.euro.who.int/ncd-actionplan>) ;

16.02.12 NCD EG Flagship-A Project Concept mvi

PREVENTION OF OVER-WEIGHT & OBESITY AMONG SCHOOLCHILDREN (ages 7-15)

selected pilot areas. Hence, this aim at universality and high coverage is the innovative objective (cutting edge) of this project concept.

Childhood and youth are crucial periods when nutritional and physical activity habits are formed. Hence, our primary focus should be in children and young adults. Scientific evidence has proven that such interventions can have long-standing effect.

The project partnership represents the diversity of the region, different institutions (local authorities including especially health-, school- and social-sectors, regional authorities and public health institutions, ministries, NGOs, universities). This partnership, enables to implement the project focusing on to stop the overweight and obesity epidemic among school-children (7-15 and eventually beyond).

The following WHO-EURO documents will provide a solid basis for project implementation:

- [Challenge of obesity in the WHO European Region and the strategies for response 2007](#)
- [Which are the known causes and consequences of obesity, and how can it be prevented?](#)
- [Addressing the socioeconomic determinants of healthy eating habits and physical activity levels among adolescents](#)
- [What is known about the effectiveness of economic instruments to reduce consumption of foods high in saturated fats and other energy-dense foods for preventing and treating obesity?](#)
- [WHO European action plan for food and nutrition policy 2007-2012](#)
- [How can health systems respond to population ageing?](#)
- [WHO European Action Plan for Food and Nutrition Policy 2007–2012](#)

The following European Union documents will provide additional strategic guidance for project implementation:

- [Prevention of Obesity in Europe – Consortium for the prevention of obesity through effective nutrition and physical activity actions – EURO-PREVOB 2010](#)
- [Take action to prevent diabetes. IMAGE. Executive Agency for Health and Consumers. 2010](#)

FINAL DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVE:

Improved long term health among school-age children (7 – 15) by reducing selected essential NCD risk factors (overweight, obesity, sedentary lifestyle,)

IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVE:

Achievement of sustainable nutritional and physical activity changes among youth so that:

- weight would remain within normal range;
- physical activity habits would continuously be above the minimum standard for healthy life (at least half-hour per day – or 3 times weekly for one hour);

WHAT IS NEW IN THIS PROJECT?

1. A lot has been done before, but why so little results? Wrong approach?
2. Combination of individual intervention AND giving priority to structural changes
3. Anthropological component/ vulnerable groups/ “ Salutogenesis “
4. Good nutrition is good and important for everyone, not only to “risk-children”
5. Good exercise is good for the quality of life for everyone not only to “risk-children”
6. Holistic approach