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# editorial



## Children and obesity - do what we say, not what we do

by Susanne Volqvartz

President, European Heart Network

**All of Europe is concerned about the dramatic increase in childhood obesity over the past two to three decades. Children in northern Europe generally have overweight prevalence rates of 10-20%, while in southern Europe the prevalence rates are 20-35%.**

In total in Europe, 14 million children are overweight, and this number is increasing by 400 000 per year. Three million of them are obese, increasing by 85 000 per year. About 90% of children in Europe eat less than the recommended amount of fruit and vegetables per day. About 75% of children in Europe have a daily intake of more than 10% of sugar and about 50% of children in Europe have a daily intake of more than 35% of fat. And about half of all children in Europe exercise less than one hour per day.

It is not surprising then that we find ourselves with a problem of overweight and obese children who, because of their weight condition, already suffer from type-2 diabetes, normally reserved for middle-aged people. And research from Australia shows that obese children as young as 10 years old have arteries resembling heavy smokers and face the prospect of coronary disease in early middle age.

Many interacting factors cause obesity. In the first phase of its project "Children,

obesity and associated avoidable chronic diseases", the European Heart Network (EHN) examined one of the factors, namely the impact of food marketing on children. At the outset of this project, we learnt that at the same time as overweight and obesity have increased amongst children, so has the percentage of sales allocated to the advertising of food.

**"A wide range of measures are needed, including at local, national and European levels and through multi-stakeholder cooperation."**

The results of the research carried out in 20 European countries on the extent and nature of marketing of unhealthy food to children in Europe are described in the article by Dr Mike Rayner, on page 5 - suffice it to say here that children are prime targets for marketing of foods such

as pre-sugared breakfast cereals or bars, candy, and salty and fatty snacks. That advertising to children does have an impact on children's food preferences, purchasing behaviour and consumption at both brand level and category levels was firmly established by the Hastings systematic review published by the UK Food Standard Agency in 2003. Research on "Lifestyle and risk of heart disease among children and adolescents", recently published in English by the EHN, stresses the need for sustained broad efforts at all levels building on several strategies - also including changing attitudes in society, for example with regard to the significance of unhealthy fast-food, rapidly increasing television viewing and smoking in public places - in order to maintain or re-establish a healthy lifestyle in children and adolescents and thereby reduce the risk of the early development of cardiovascular disease (see article by Dr Lars Ovesen, page 3).

**"EHN proposes that in order to limit the marketing of unhealthy food to children,... a total ban on the advertising of unhealthy foods to children in the Television without Frontiers Directive [is needed]."**

On the following pages, heart foundations involved in the "Children, obesity and associated avoidable chronic diseases" project report on the situation of childhood obesity and on the findings of their research with regard to the marketing of unhealthy food products to children in their own countries. The national coordinators also write about measures already taken to address the problem in their countries as well as about proposals for specific measures, such as a weekly soft drink limit, and collaborative initiatives like national versions of the European Platform on Diet, Physical Activity and Health. From this information it is clear that a wide range of measures are needed, including at local, national and European levels and through multi-stakeholder cooperation.

However, all the best efforts in the world aimed at addressing childhood obesity - including interventions in schools and innovative programmes such as for example multi-media information and training programmes - will not be effective unless the exogenous factors, or the surrounding environment, are addressed as well. In this context EHN proposes that in order to limit the marketing of unhealthy food to children, one specific measure is needed now, namely a total ban on the advertising of unhealthy foods to children in the Television without Frontiers Directive. This will reduce children's exposure to such advertising dramatically and will apply to all EU Member States simultaneously. It will also show the children that we are not asking them to do as we say - without changing what we do.



"At the same time as overweight and obesity have increased amongst children, so has the percentage of sales allocated to advertising of food... children are prime targets for marketing of foods such as pre-sugared breakfast cereals or bars, candy, and salty and fatty snacks."



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Heart Matters, focusing on cardiovascular disease prevention, is a publication relevant to policy makers, public health experts and organisations involved in health promotion, disease prevention and public health research.

# Heart disease starts in the younger years

by Lars Ovesen, M.D., Health Executive, Danish Heart Foundation

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Results of several studies concerning children and adolescents indicate that the process of atherosclerosis starts at an early age. Cardiovascular risk factors can be identified in childhood and are predictive of adulthood risk for coronary artery disease. Demonstrable atherosclerotic lesions can already be observed during the teenage years, and are present in about a quarter of young adults. Autopsy studies in youth have also established a strong association between cardiovascular risk factors and early stages of coronary atherosclerosis. Furthermore, measurement of the wall thickness of the carotid artery by ultrasound, which is a reliable and valid non-invasive surrogate endpoint for coronary heart disease risk, has shown that wall thickness in young adults is directly associated with the number of risk factors present in childhood.

A significant number of children and adolescents in our societies engage in unhealthy behaviour - they eat an unhealthy diet, are physically inactive and smoke. An unhealthy behaviour increases the presence of biological risk factors, such as inferior physical fitness, obesity, hypertension and dyslipidaemia that ultimately increase the risk of coronary heart disease. In recent years it has even become clear that an increasing number of children are afflicted with metabolic syndrome.

## Tracking of risk

Habits regarding eating, physical activity and smoking and their related biological risk factors developed in the younger years are generally assumed to continue into adulthood, a phenomenon called tracking. This assumption justifies the targeting of early remedial strategies, i.e. health promoting programmes or screening programmes, aimed at children and adolescents.

Science shows that both lifestyle and cardiovascular risk factors track from childhood and adolescence into adulthood. This makes it possible to identify individuals who are more likely to have a higher risk of heart disease as adults, on the basis of the presence of an unhealthy lifestyle and/or high

level of cardiovascular risk factors early in life. However, the predictive values are generally weak, and weaker for lifestyle than for risk factors. This is good news because it means that risk behaviour is not firmly entrenched during childhood, because a large number of children will have changed their lifestyle and risk factors as adults.

It also means that prevention of coronary heart disease in adults cannot rely solely on identification and treatment of high risk groups in adolescence. Population-based approaches are likely to be more effective than targeting only the high-risk subset because of the generally poor prediction of adult lifestyle and risk factor levels from childhood measures.



## Lifestyle is influenced by several factors

In order to be able to change an unhealthy lifestyle and its consequences, it is necessary to unravel the many factors that determine individual lifestyle. In a macro-perspective a range of political, economic, societal, technological and developmental factors are at play, and all have a major impact on lifestyle and consequently on the risk of disease:

- **Political-economic**  
Public health policies, purchasing; power, regulation, price policies.
- **Marketing**  
Advertising, labelling, health campaigns.
- **Availability**  
Fast-food restaurants, soft drink vending-machines, fitness centres.
- **Technological developments**  
Car transport, computers, TV.

However, a number of other factors - such factors are also called determinants - are as important and work more on the "micro" level, but interact with the macro-level factors. These determinants can be demographic (age, sex, social status, education, ethnicity) or can belong to the personal sphere (family-school-peer relations, norms, knowledge, skills, attitudes, self-image, self-efficacy). Many of these micro-level determinants are interrelated, just as the risk behaviour of adolescents is interrelated.

It has to be acknowledged that certain determinants have particular importance for the behaviour of children and adolescents during particular stages of development - and are completely irrelevant at other times. As an example,

determinants of food intake among young children, who are deeply dependent on their parents, are obviously very different from determinants governing the eating patterns of adolescents, who are attempting to liberate themselves from dependency on adults. Diet composition therefore varies considerably with age.

Although most determinants have an influence on risk behaviour as such this does not mean - as is commonly believed - that an improvement in one risk behaviour (increased intake of fruits and vegetables) automatically improves another risk behaviour (increased physical activity). Indeed, even though risk behaviour seems to exist in clusters, experiments indicate no relationship between changes in behaviour.

However, there is good scientific evidence that changes made simultaneously in several lifestyle factors have an additive or even synergistic effect on cardiovascular risk factors. For these reasons, interventions

should perhaps include major risk behaviours - diet, physical activity and smoking - simultaneously.

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## What do we know about determinants for lifestyle?

Unfortunately there are relatively few longitudinal studies examining the influence of the many factors which could be crucial for choosing a certain lifestyle. However, it is known that certain determinants are very important.

Eating habits of family and friends are determinants of the dietary intake, food choices and eating habits of children and adolescents, but so are portion sizes, to an increasing extent, as well as eating out, especially in fast food outlets. The importance of advertising in influencing the food choices of children and adolescents has also been demonstrated.

Availability is crucial to the intake of healthy food among children and adolescents. The effect of food pricing has not been adequately examined.

The exercise patterns of parents seem to have a great influence on whether children are physically active. But other factors are also important, e.g. self-efficacy, will power, participation in organised sport and the presence of sports facilities in the vicinity of home or school. It is not clear whether television viewing, on the other hand, influences children's levels of daily physical activity.

With regard to smoking, research has identified a number of determinants that come into play at different stages, to varying degrees, in the smoking behaviour of adolescents. Here as well the behaviour and attitude of friends, family and society towards smoking have a decisive effect on whether adolescents take up smoking. It is well known from extensive research that banning the marketing and sale of cigarettes to children and adolescents and instituting higher prices both reduce the incidence of smoking. The personal attributes of the adolescent, e.g. good self-efficacy, are also very important.

## What do we know from intervention trials?

A number of intervention trials have been conducted in "the field", building on different theoretical models. Trials have most often been carried out in school settings, and have included the family and local community less often. Generally these trials have shown that it is possible to induce appropriate changes in particular lifestyles as long as the intervention is ongoing, but follow-up investigations have typically shown a gradual congruence in effect measures between the intervention and control groups. A sustained effort is thus required in order to maintain healthier lifestyles.

The best and most comprehensive studies are multi-component programmes conducted in the US to limit adolescent smoking, which have resulted in considerable reductions in tobacco consumption. Strategies included media-borne information, legislation banning smoking in schools and public institutions, bans on the sale of tobacco to adolescents, and high price increases on tobacco products in combination with a wide range of local initiatives, for example the establishment of smoking policies at workplaces and more comprehensive school-based

programmes as well as the establishment of smoking cessation programmes for individual citizens.

There are no similar findings for the areas of diet or exercise. More research is clearly needed. Along with research on factors which influence lifestyle, there is also a need for the development of effective collaboration and commitment among major societal sectors - the government, corporate, community, and non-profit sectors.

## Conclusion

Intervention studies at the whole population level clearly demonstrate that health behaviour change in children and adolescents is most successful if the effort

- employs theoretical models of change, and
- involves all societal levels:
  - political/regulatory level;
  - local community level;
  - small group level; and
  - family level.

However, the effort has to be long-term and oftentimes continuous, and even so the process of change is notoriously slow. This is the case for children and adults alike. One could ask why it is so difficult to change behaviour. The crux of the problem probably lies in the fact that it takes decades before the profits of a behavioural change can be reaped. The British epidemiologist Geoffrey Rose has put it most succinctly:

"In preventive medicine the prospect of personal benefits to health provides only a weak motivation to accept a change, since it is neither immediate nor substantial, and an individual's health next year is likely to be much the same, regardless whether that person accepts or rejects the proffered advice".

In the end healthy behaviour has to become a societal norm.

# The marketing of unhealthy food to children in Europe

Mike Rayner, Director, British Heart Foundation Health Promotion Research Group, University of Oxford

Increasing obesity, especially among children, is being noted with mounting concern throughout the whole of Europe. This is because the health effects of the increasing levels are beginning to be felt. Throughout Europe diabetic clinics have begun to note cases of type 2 diabetes in children - a condition closely associated with obesity and previously confined to adults - and for the first time in living memory many countries in Europe are facing a decline in life-expectancy because of the adverse affects of increasing levels of obesity and type 2 diabetes on chronic disease rates, particularly rates of cardiovascular disease.

This has caused alarm amongst European Union (EU) policy makers. The European Commission recently established a European Platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health to coordinate efforts to halt or at least slow the increase in obesity rates. The Platform involves all of the major stakeholders: health bodies including the European Heart Network (EHN), which is a founding member; consumer organisations; and bodies representing the agricultural, food manufacturing, retailing, catering and advertising industries.

## Results of the Research

The research<sup>2</sup> published in the report "The marketing of unhealthy food to children in Europe" showed first of all that in all 20 countries the vast majority of food marketing aimed at children is for unhealthy foods, i.e. foods that are high in fat, particularly saturated fat, sugar or salt and low in essential minerals, vitamins and other components important for a healthy diet. The amounts spent on this each year are vast: for example almost 2 million euros in Greece and 238 million SEK in Sweden. Most of this marketing is via TV advertising, although there is some evidence that the way food is marketed to children is

According to its founding document, the purpose of the Platform is: "to provide a common forum for all interested actors at European level where: (a) they can explain their plans to contribute concretely to the pursuit of healthy nutrition, physical activity and the fight against obesity, and where those plans can be discussed; (b) outcomes and experience from actors' performance can be reported and reviewed, so that over time better evidence is assembled of what works, and best practice more clearly defined."

Because the aim of the EHN is to play a leading role in the prevention of cardiovascular disease, since its inception in 1992 it has sought to raise the issue of poor diets and lack of physical activity in Europe. The growing concern about increasing obesity provided the spur to a new project started in March 2004, the 'Children, obesity and associated avoidable chronic diseases project', led by the EHN and part-funded by the European Commission. The aim of this project is to help reduce obesity amongst children and young people.

changing, with a move away from TV to other means such as marketing via the Internet or through schools. It seems that the advertising industry is becoming increasingly sophisticated at marketing foods to children using such devices as text messaging and interactive websites.

Secondly, it was clear that most countries have an incoherent patchwork of legal and voluntary controls on the marketing of foods to children. These controls do next to nothing to prevent children from being exposed to the sheer barrage of marketing of unhealthy foods.

The first phase of this 32-month project has concentrated on the marketing of unhealthy food to children, not because this is the only reason why children are getting fatter, but because it is clearly part of the problem and of growing interest in European policy circles. In January - just prior to the launch of the European Platform - the European Commissioner Markos Kyprianou gave an interview to the Financial Times in which he gave the food industry one year to stop targeting children with advertisements for unhealthy food or face the threat of new EU legislation.

During the first phase of the project (March 2004 - February 2005), information was collected on the marketing of food to children in 20 different European countries in a standardised way<sup>1</sup>. The data gatherers for the project - national heart foundations in those countries - collected information on the type and amount of food marketing to children, the regulation of food marketing, attitudes towards food marketing to children, and counterbalancing measures used to combat any negative effects of current food marketing practices in their countries.



<sup>1</sup> The countries that participate in the research are: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Finland, France, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the UK.

<sup>2</sup> The report "The Marketing of Unhealthy Food to Children in Europe" can be consulted on [www.ehnheart.org](http://www.ehnheart.org).

Even in Norway and Sweden, where there is a ban on TV advertising aimed at children from national TV stations, children are exposed to TV advertising from other countries in Europe.

Thirdly the research uncovered the beginnings of a furore about food marketing aimed at children, with children, parents, teachers, health professionals and their representative organisations increasingly calling for stricter controls. Some people within the food and advertising industry recognise that there is a problem but the majority deny it, and governments

are bemused. Some governments clearly do feel they need to do something, but most are not sure what.

Lastly, the research found that there is quite a lot going on to counter the effects of unhealthy food marketing to children, but that these measures are unlikely to be effective. The most obvious way of countering the effects of unhealthy food marketing to children is to stop it, or at least restrict it, but only in Norway and Sweden have such measures been adopted, and then only in a limited way. Generally the solution has been thought to be better education. In all the

countries that were covered by the research, efforts were being made to educate children about healthy eating and to promote the consumption of healthy foods such as fruit and vegetables, for example through "5 a day" campaigns. The food and advertising industry has developed media literacy programmes aimed at improving children's understanding of food marketing. But all these initiatives, however worthy, are clearly dwarfed by the sheer volume and sophistication of unhealthy food marketing.

## Policy recommendations

The findings of the research suggest that stricter controls on food marketing to children are necessary at a European level, as Commissioner Kyprianou has suggested - and preferably sooner rather than later. As a first step, the EU's TV Without Frontiers Directive should be amended to prohibit TV advertising of "unhealthy" food and drinks to children. Moreover, additional measures will be needed to protect children from all forms of unhealthy food marketing including that through schools and the Internet.

This means there needs to be a common EU definition of an "unhealthy" food. This will also be necessary in view of the current development of an EU regulation

on nutrition and health claims and the forthcoming review of the EU's nutrition labelling directive. This might seem a controversial recommendation since many nutritionists have previously thought that there are no healthy and unhealthy foods, but rather only healthy and unhealthy diets. However, this view is breaking down, and nutritionists increasingly realise that there are some foods which people need to eat more of (healthy foods) and some they need to eat less of (unhealthy foods) and of course many foods in between. Without clear and agreed definitions here, effective regulation of food marketing to protect children's health will not be possible.

The research also points to the need for a pan-European monitoring system to monitor the nature and extent of food marketing to children and its regulation. In collecting information during the first phase of the project the heart foundations had substantial difficulties in finding relevant data, particularly about the type and amount of food marketing to children and how this is changing. Moreover, much of the information that is available is not comparable between countries. So while the general picture is clear, more data are needed, as is a centralised and standardised system for collecting such information and for monitoring changes.

## Future steps

The report of the first phase of the 'Children, obesity and associated avoidable chronic disease project' was launched at a high-level dinner debate held in Brussels on 27 April 2005<sup>3</sup>. The debate was opened by Robert Madelin, Director General for Health and Consumer Protection. The report generated considerable debate amongst those attending, who included Members of the European Parliament, representatives from the European Commission, the World

Health Organization, the food industry and consumers' organisations. Naturally not all agreed with the report's conclusions, but all did agree that something needed to be done to prevent obesity. EHN remains convinced that banning the advertising of unhealthy food to children is a priority.

The next phase of the project will be to examine policy options and assess the priorities for what needs to be done to

prevent childhood obesity. This phase will look beyond changing the way foods are marketed to children to everything that might be done to improve diets and promote physical activity. Preliminary findings from this next phase will be available next year.

<sup>3</sup> The report from this dinner debate "Obesity: the impact of marketing of unhealthy food to children in Europe", report of a high level dinner debate organized by forum Europe (EHN: Brussels) can be consulted on [www.ehnheart.org](http://www.ehnheart.org).

# European policy developments

## New health and consumer protection programme for 2007-2013

On 6 April 2005, the European Commission adopted a proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and the Council establishing a Programme of Community Action in the field of Health and Consumer Protection 2007-2013.

With this proposal, the Commission brings together public health and consumer protection in one programme. The rationale for this, according to the Commission, is that many objectives of health and consumer actions are shared and that these two policies use many similar types of actions to pursue their objectives. The Commission also states that a joint programme will offer

savings and synergies in terms of streamlined administrative and budgetary procedures, common tools and a common executive agency.

The common objectives are: to protect citizens from risks and threats that are beyond the control of individuals; to increase the ability of citizens to take better decisions about their health and consumer interests; and to mainstream health and consumer policy objectives. The specific health objectives are: to protect citizens against health threats; to promote policies that lead to a healthier way of life; to contribute to reducing

the incidence of major diseases; and to improve efficiency and effectiveness in health systems.

The Commission is proposing a total budget of 1 203 million euros. Of this amount, 814 million will be dedicated to public health actions. This means a budget which is more than double the current budget.

More details on the new programme can be found via the following website link:  
[http://europa.eu.int/comm/health/ph\\_overview/pgm2007\\_2013\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/health/ph_overview/pgm2007_2013_en.htm)

## New EU research programme

On 6 April 2005, the European Commission adopted a proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and the Council concerning the Seventh Framework Programme for Research, Technological Development and Demonstration Activities (2007-2013) (FP7).

FP7 is considered to be the cornerstone in knowledge policy, which also includes the Structural and Cohesion Funds, the Competitiveness and Innovations Framework Programme, the new generation of the Education and Training Programme, Trans-European Networks and the new European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.

The objectives for the health sub-programme are to improve the health of European citizens and increase the competitiveness of European health-related industries and businesses while addressing global health issues that include emerging epidemics. Emphasis will be placed on translational research (translation of basic discoveries into clinical applications), the development and validation of new therapies, methods for health promotion and prevention, diagnostic tools and technologies, as well as sustainable and efficient healthcare systems.

Activities foreseen in the health subprogramme include:

- Translational research in major diseases, including cardiovascular diseases (CVD), with a view to developing patient-oriented strategies from prevention to diagnosis and treatment, including clinical research;
- Translating clinical outcomes into clinical practice with a view to understanding clinical decision-making and how to translate outcomes of clinical research into clinical practice, and especially addressing the specificities of children, women and the elderly population;
- Enhanced disease prevention and better use of medicines with a view to developing efficient public health interventions that address wider determinants of health (such as stress, diet or environmental factors) and to identifying successful interventions in different healthcare settings for improving the prescribing of medicines and improving their use by patients (including pharmacovigilance aspects).

The Commission is proposing a total budget of 73 215 million euros for FP7, which is 4.5 times more than the budget agreed for FP6, currently in place. The

Commission justifies its budget proposal with the need for increased funds for research in Europe, which is spending less on R&D than the US and Japan, and with reference to the significant role that the FP7 will play in re-launching the Lisbon Strategy, which aims at increasing economic growth and reducing unemployment whilst maintaining the 'European Social Model'.

The largest part of the total budget, namely 60% (44 735 million euros), is allocated to the programme on Cooperation. In this programme, health is allocated 8 373 million euros; Food, agriculture and biotechnology is allocated 2 472 million euros; and Socio-economic sciences and the humanities is allocated 798 million euros.

More details on the new programme can be found via the following website link:  
[http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/future/index\\_en.cfm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/research/future/index_en.cfm)

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## EU Platform on Diet, Physical Activity and Health

On 15 March 2005, Commissioner Kyprianou launched the EU Platform on Diet, Physical Activity and Health. In this platform, industry and consumer groups, health experts and political leaders will work together to tackle Europe's obesity epidemic. The Platform will consider voluntary action in the fields of consumer information and education, marketing and advertising, promotion of physical activity, composition of food and portion sizes. Over the coming months, members of the Platform will put forward action plans detailing the activities they will undertake

to promote healthier diets or encourage people to take more exercise. In the next few months, platform members will report what they do already (2004 outcomes and 2005 action plans constitute the baseline). Outcomes from performance against this baseline will be reported in the months ahead. So too will plans for 2006, where the aim is that there should be an increasing level of resources and effort beyond their baselines by each actor for current or new action designed to reverse the obesity trend. The aim is that 2006 commitments include

benchmarks or possible indicators to make monitoring and reporting back more effective over time. Three working groups were created in order to streamline the further policy development in this field: on monitoring, informing consumer behaviour and healthy lifestyles.

More information on the platform and on the working groups can be found on the following website:

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/health/ph\\_det/erminants/life\\_style/nutrition/platform/platform\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/health/ph_det/erminants/life_style/nutrition/platform/platform_en.htm)

## EFSA Stakeholder Consultative Platform

EFSA, The European Food Safety Authority, has decided to create a Stakeholder Consultative Platform composed of EU-wide stakeholder organisations operating in the food chain. This platform will assist EFSA with the development of its overall relations and policy with regard to stakeholders' involvement with task and missions by providing a forum for regular dialogue and exchanges. Among other things, the platform will

advise EFSA with regard to the impact of its work on stakeholders. Operating in relation to the competences of EFSA, the platform will:

- comment on EFSA's work programme;
- provide EFSA with feedback on the effectiveness of its policies in responding to stakeholders' concerns;
- alert EFSA to key issues of current or emerging stakeholders' concern;

- advise on methodologies, including the topics for consultation and the best way to organise such consultations;
- provide information and cooperation at the technical level.

The first meeting of this platform is scheduled for September 2005.



## Smoke-Free Europe conference (2 June 2005)

On 2 June 2005, Smokefree Europe 2005<sup>1</sup> (an alliance of health organisations active in the tobacco control field) organised a conference on smoke-free workplaces. The conference, which was endorsed by the Luxembourg Presidency of the EU, was attended by representatives of European employers, trade unions, the hotel, restaurant and catering sector, and leading researchers in the smoke-free field. Ten EU health ministers also attended and spoke at this conference, and four EU health (or former health) ministers were given awards by the organisers for having introduced smoke-free legislation in all work places, including bars and restaurants: Ireland, (Micheál Martin), Italy (Girolamo Sirchia), Malta (Louis Deguara) and

Sweden (Morgan Johansson). The conference developed both economic and other arguments in favour of smoke-free workplaces. The smoke-free Europe Partnership economic impact report "Smoke-free Europe makes economic sense" (launched at the Luxembourg conference) compared statistics from regions where smoke-free legislation has already been introduced. It also contains new data on drinking trends across Europe. The report shows that a Europe-wide trend toward drinking alcohol at home rather than in bars and pubs appears to account for the apparent downturn in trade after the Irish smoke-free legislation was introduced in 2004.

Smoke-free Europe signalled its willingness to work with employers, the hospitality industry and employment unions on developing robust legislation for the protection of workers. EHN's president, Susanne Volqvartz, said that "there is no longer any serious debate that second-hand smoke kills. Europe's employers and trade unions are on notice of this fact and they must take immediate action to protect their workers' and members' health. We want to work with them and we hope that this conference will be the start of a constructive dialogue on smoke-free workplaces."

The report is available from the website: [www.smokefreeeurope.com](http://www.smokefreeeurope.com)

<sup>1</sup> Smokefree Europe 2005 was organised by Cancer Research UK ([www.cancerresearchuk.org](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org)); the European Respiratory Society ([www.ersnet.org/ers](http://www.ersnet.org/ers)), the European Cancer Leagues, the European Heart Network ([www.ehnheart.org](http://www.ehnheart.org)) and the French League Against Cancer ([www.ligue-cancer.net](http://www.ligue-cancer.net)).

## Heart Health Conference

With a view to promote cardiovascular disease (CVD) prevention measures across Europe, the European Commission's Heart Health Conference convened representatives of health ministries, national cardiac societies, and heart foundations, and was organised by the European Commission's Directorate General Health and Consumer Protection, and the Luxembourg Presidency in partnership with the European Society of Cardiology (ESC). The conference's objective was to reiterate the importance of conclusions from the Health Council Meeting held in June 2004. Its main focus was to come away with key actions that EU Member States and the European

Commission can implement to promote cardiovascular health in Europe. Member States will now take back to their ministries of health various national public health strategies. Conclusions of the conference are contained in an official document entitled the "Luxembourg Declaration"<sup>2</sup>. Commenting on what needs to be done following the conference, Luxembourg Minister of Health Mars Di Bartolomeo said, "A long-term approach is necessary, through public health strategies which are transparent, multisectorial and multi-disciplinary, based on the best available research and scientific evidence." According to Professor Michal Tendera,

ESC President, "Cardiovascular disease is definitely a political problem, since more than 40% of Europeans die of coronary artery disease, stroke and other cardiovascular conditions. I am happy that the ESC can address this problem together with politicians."

The European Commission notes the threatening disease burden caused by CVD and points to its preventable nature and major determinates. The European Commission aims to tackle these determinates in the framework of its mandate and established instruments.

## New EHN publication "Fruit and vegetable policy in the European Union"

In the summer of 2005, EHN launched its new publication "Fruit and vegetable policy in the European Union: Its effect on the burden of cardiovascular disease"<sup>3</sup>. The purpose of this paper is to examine the potential effect of the EU Common Agricultural Policy fruit and vegetable regime on the burden of CVD. There is a huge burden of cardiovascular disease (CVD) in Europe. CVD is responsible for 1.9 million (42% of the total) deaths in the European Union per year (Petersen, Peto et al. 2005). The World Health Organization's World Health Report 2003 noted that CVD makes up 16.7 million (29.2%) of total worldwide deaths, while in the European region CVD was responsible for between 26.8% and 55.8% of total deaths (World Health Organization 2003). Although CVD mortality and incidence have been falling over the last 20 years in most northern, southern and western European countries, they are rising in many central and eastern European countries. CVD remains the leading cause of death in women in all countries of

Europe, and in men for all countries except France and San Marino (Petersen, Peto et al. 2005). Cardiovascular risk factors are well known and mostly amenable to change. Public health policies aimed at reducing rates of cardiovascular diseases have typically emphasised the traditional risk factors such as smoking, high blood pressure, elevated blood cholesterol and physical inactivity. Dietary interventions have tended to focus on reducing consumption of fat, in particular saturated fat, and salt. In the past less policy attention has been given to the impact of fruit and vegetable consumption. However, this is of growing importance as the nutrition transition, occurring in all but the poorest countries of the world, is resulting in traditional plant-based diets rich in fruit and vegetables being replaced by diets rich in animal fats, salt and sugar, and low in complex carbohydrates (Popkin 2002). Dietary patterns across Europe, which once displayed cultural differences, are now converging.



<sup>2</sup>The Luxembourg Declaration is available from the website: <http://www.escardio.org/NR/rdonlyres/97677661-EEA74AA3-81C3-1B59C2D6A542/0/LuxembourgDeclaration.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup>The EHN publication can be downloaded from the "Publications" section on EHN's website [www.ehnheart.org](http://www.ehnheart.org).



# Children and obesity: the situation in Austria

Austria does not have concrete figures on overweight children, but the International Obesity Task Force estimates that approximately 20% of school-age children in Europe are carrying excess body fat, with an increased risk of developing chronic diseases. The numbers for Austria are likely to be in this general range.

Childhood obesity is a risk factor for the development of cardiovascular diseases (CVD). It is a fact that school-age children in Austria eat too much fat and sugar, but there is no commonly agreed definition for a food that is high in fat, salt or sugar or for "unhealthy" food.

### **Lack of information, no regulation of advertising to children**

In Austria, no specific figures regarding budgets for food advertising for children can be found. However, advertising targeted at children, such as marketing in the schools, Internet-based advertising and especially TV spots are a widespread practice in Austria. Food companies are involved in this kind of advertising. Almost all producers of "unhealthy" food promote their products on their own websites. Kids clubs invite children to participate, include cartoon-style games and special magazines for children.

At the present time there is no strong regulation concerning this kind of marketing for Austria.

### **Positive promotion has been initiated**

Besides "negative" marketing of unhealthy foods, there are promotion schemes running in Austria with the aim of increasing the consumption of fruits and vegetables. The most popular projects are the "five a day" scheme to persuade people to ensure that their daily diet includes a minimum of five portions of fruit and vegetables, and advertising for the "healthy apple".

A number of projects are running - including in schools - with the aim of promoting physical activity. These projects also include special programmes for overweight children that are implemented in combination with nutrition consulting.

Reaching younger target groups with more positive healthy eating messages is very difficult. Focussing the communication on the parents and teachers is a successful way to have an influence on the lifestyle of children.

### **Austrian Heart Foundation to launch prevention project**

In October 2005 the Austrian Heart Foundation will start the prevention programme "children and obesity". For the time being three schools in Vienna are involved in this activity.

The project starts with a questionnaire for children 10 to 16 years old. The medical practitioner of the schools will evaluate the weight, the Body Mass Index and the waist circumference of the children who complete the questionnaire.

The second phase will include intervention in cooperation with the medical practitioner of the school, teachers, nutrition experts and the parents. Additional excursions to food production facilities are planned.

An important part of this project is cooperative work with the owners of the school buffets, who will be encouraged to label healthy food for the children.



# Food marketing to children in Belgium

When talking about food marketing and obesity, the picture in Belgium is largely comparable with the rest of Europe:

- Precise information about food marketing to children is largely lacking or difficult to obtain. The recommendation formulated in the EHN report, that "effective structures and procedures should be established to monitor the nature and extent of food marketing to children and its regulation throughout Europe" is also of importance here. In Belgium it was especially difficult to obtain information about the situation in the French-speaking part of the country;
- The large majority of food marketing to children concerns food that, if eaten in excess, will contribute to obesity. Data we collected in Flanders after the completion of the European survey confirm that the situation is similar in our region: during one month, all the commercials broadcast by one of two popular Flemish TV channels from 16.30h to 18.00h were recorded. Of the 1016 commercials recorded, 27% were about food, and of these 72% advertised food products that exceeded recommended norms for sugar and/or fat<sup>1</sup>. Results of a recent study including French-speaking channels confirm these conclusions<sup>2</sup>;
- The food industry spends a considerable amount of money on the marketing of these unhealthy foods. Television marketing remains by far the method that is used most intensively, but increasingly a variety of complex and creative marketing strategies are used. With broadcast advertising it is difficult to differentiate between commercials directed to children or to others. This could be solved by restricting the number of advertisements during the hours that children watch TV. Furthermore, it is difficult to find out how much of the (large) budget spent on advertising is meant for messages to children;

- The regulation of such marketing is partial at best and largely uncoordinated and not sufficiently enforced. As a self-imposed measure, the Belgian food industry (Fevia) adopted a set of principles from the International Chamber of Commerce, including principles for advertisement to children, as from 1 May 2005;
- A substantial number of counterbalancing actions are undertaken, but these are typically small-scale and largely uncoordinated. Most actions are restricted to health education strategies, neglecting the stronger environmental and motivational strategies. It remains to be seen if the national plan for nutrition and health that is now in preparation will bring real progress. It seems encouraging that several academic departments are becoming increasingly involved in these matters.

### Measures recommended stress cooperation

Food marketing clearly is an important aspect of the childhood obesity problem, and the EHN project on "Children, Obesity and Associated Avoidable Chronic Diseases" laid the groundwork for collaborative and sound action. Collaboration is sought not only geographically, involving most European countries, but also in terms of getting all the main actors involved at the same time: the political level, certainly, but the food industry, food distribution sector and the catering industry should also all be partners in this effort. It does not make sense to engage in this effort 'against' these groups, and doing so may well mean a battle that is difficult to win.

There seems to be a growing willingness from the side of the food industry - at least in our country - to take this health aspect into consideration. Of course, this does not mean that this collaboration will be easy or that it will always be effective.

A number of problems will have to be addressed in advance; two of these are mentioned in the report:

- Are we talking about unhealthy foods or about unhealthy diets? Of course the food industry will tend to maintain that all foods have their place in a balanced diet, and of course this is true. But as the authors correctly state in the report, it is equally true that some foods are more likely than others to contribute to an unhealthy diet and can, in this sense, be called "unhealthy". It will take some effort to get the food industry to follow this reasoning;
- The second point is related to the first: the industry tends to maintain that it is entirely the consumer's responsibility to choose the food he or she wants to eat, and that the industry's only responsibility in helping the consumer to put together a balanced diet is to inform him or her about the composition of each food item. This is not entirely correct because food choice is not made exclusively, and probably not even primarily on the basis of rational choice and/or health considerations, even if we assume that the information given would be usable for the average consumer. Many other variables also play a role, such as availability, price, convenience etc. And many of these variables are under the control of industry, the distribution sector and the government.

So the problem is not solved yet, but this project may be a good start in the right direction.

<sup>1</sup> M.E. Houben (2005). Onderzoek naar de invloed van reclame op obesiteit bij kinderen. Departement Rega. Leuven, KH Leuven.

<sup>2</sup> S. Bonnewyn, X. Deboutse and S. Dochy (2005), "TV-reclame en kinderen. Bewuste reclamevereters of teledummies?", Test-Aankoop February (484): 22-26.

## One soft drink per week

### The Danish Heart Foundation recommends guideline limit for children

One 500 ml soft drink per week: this is what the Danish Heart Foundation recommends as the guideline limit for children and adolescents. A limit for soft drinks should help to curb the excessive intake of sugar. That is one reason for the rapidly increasing incidence of overweight and obesity among children.

Eighty per cent of Danish children and adolescents consume too much sugar. A major source of sugar intake is highly sweetened soft drinks, which children consume in far too great quantities. This is why the Danish Heart Foundation is recommending general health guidelines to limit children's consumption of soft drinks.

The recommendation is part of the Danish Heart Foundation's proposed initiatives to combat child obesity. The proposals, which come as a response to the call for action in a new report published by the European Heart Network (EHN)<sup>1</sup>, were published in full in August 2005.

### Recommendations connected with EHN project

The proposed guideline limit for soft drinks was launched to coincide with a major publication of the Children, Obesity and Associated Avoidable Chronic Diseases Project. In this EHN project, EHN member organisations surveyed the extent of food advertising targeting children in their countries. The report concludes that all food marketing to children in England and Denmark promotes unhealthy food.

The Danish Heart Foundation is working through the EHN to support the report recommendations, which include the banning of TV advertising of unhealthy food to children. The ban should be implemented on a Europe-wide basis, as TV advertisements are broadcast across

national boundaries. Commenting on the report, Susanne Volqvartz, President of the EHN and Director General of the Danish Heart Foundation, appeals to decision makers:

"I hope Danish decision makers will understand the need for action. This European report concludes that national and international initiatives are called for, and decision makers must assume the responsibility for ensuring that the future generation does not become a generation of overweight and malnourished citizens. The impact of marketing is so massive that counter measures are essential. That is why we are now working on a number of measures to curb an extremely unhealthy trend. In the everyday life of children, measures include the guideline limit for soft drinks, but action is also needed at industry level, where large corporations are extremely influential through their massive marketing efforts."

The Danish proposals are based on the findings of a recent report by the Danish Heart Foundation on lifestyle and the risk of heart disease among children and adolescents<sup>2</sup>.

The report, conducted in collaboration with Danish scientists, reviews the latest Danish and international scientific knowledge in the area. With assistance from the Netherlands Heart Foundation, the report has been translated into English and published by the EHN in July this year. More information on this report can be found in the article on page 3.

### School children jump onto the water wagon

Danish primary schools drop soft-drink vending machines and instead install water dispensers providing cold drinking water.

On 1 April 2005, the soft-drink vending machine in Kingo School in Slangerup was replaced with a water dispenser.

Pupils can now buy cold mineral water during breaks. Behind the initiative was Caja Winterø, parent representative on the school board. "I was shocked when I first saw a Coca Cola vending machine in my child's school. There is absolutely no reason for children to drink soft drinks while at school," Caja Winterø points out.

Sønderris School in Esbjerg also provides access to cold water, and here it is for free. With the start of this new school year, 600 school children will be able to fill their drink bottles with cold water from water taps. The water project is part of the school's new dietary policy which will be introduced after the summer holidays, and includes the banning of sweets and soft drinks. Instead, pupils will have to bring a healthy lunch pack to school.

Anja Biltøft-Jensen, a nutrition expert at the Danish Institute for Food and Veterinary Research, is pleased that more schools are dropping soft-drink vending machines in favour of cold water.

"It's a disgrace that Danish primary-school pupils have no real choice when it comes to choosing between a healthy and unhealthy diet. Schools are overflowing with sweets and king-size soft drinks, while children most often have to get their water from the taps next to the toilets", says Anja Biltøft-Jensen.

According to the latest survey on diet from the Danish Institute for Food and Veterinary Research, children today drink 38% more soft drinks than they did ten years ago. In 1995, they drank 133 ml per day. Now 184 ml of sugary soft drinks are washed down each day.

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<sup>1</sup> The marketing of unhealthy foods to children in Europe, EHN, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Lifestyle and Risk of Heart Disease among Children and Adolescents, European Heart Network, 2005.

# Children and marketing in Estonia

The Estonian media has not paid much attention to overweight so far. Various weight-losing diets and advice for physical activity appear quite often, but they focus mainly on good looks rather than health. Many people do not have the slightest clue how dangerous obesity really is.

Even less has been said about obesity among children and the related problems. There is not even a clear view of how serious the problem in Estonia is. The latest German scientists' research concluded that fewer than 8% of 13 to 15-year-old children in Estonia suffer from excessive weight, which is a better percentage than in Western European countries. Although specialists have admitted the existence of the problem, for many people it seems hypocritical to talk about the problem of obesity when many children are still undernourished.

But it is obvious that the situation will only grow worse. Estonian children do not get enough exercise and spend nearly twice as much time with computers and TV as the same cohort in Western Europe. If we look at the experience of other European countries, in the long term this will lead to a sharp rise in overweight and associated problems. According to one expert, the eating habits of Estonian adults have steadily become healthier; however, at the same time children are consuming more and more food high in salt, sugar and/or fat.

### Industry acts

Industry has also noticed this growing consumer group, and children are actively targeted by companies. A great deal of money is involved. Research carried out early this year (by TNS Emor), showed that in 2004 children aged 6-14 received pocket money for a total value of over 21 million euros, an amount which has increased by almost one third in the past

two years. The majority was spent on food. The children mainly buy soft drinks, followed by ice cream, chocolate, candies and chewing gum. Besides sweets the money went for crisps and pastry.

Nutrition lessons in schools are offered as a solution. A new advertising law is being drafted that would ban all commercials in schools (except social advertising). Hopefully this law will come into force, because several frightening cases are known. For example, in the spring of this year advertisements in schools encouraged classes to send off 100 chocolate wrappers to receive a whole new box in return. The five classes that sent the most wrappers would get a trip as a prize. To make matters worse, in some schools teachers pushed children to participate to win the trip. One boy confessed to the press that he was not able to eat that much chocolate himself; instead he fed the leftovers to his dog.

Although there is a national advertising law and most of the companies acknowledge self-regulations set by the International Chamber of Commerce, a great deal of marketing to children is unethical or close to the line. Our people are not used to seeing through aggressive marketing. To bring out the best example, we have to speak about the background.

### Kalev and Kalev

The biggest manufacturer of sweets in Estonia, and in some people's opinion the national pride, is the 200-year-old 'Kalev' confectionery factory. As it is a big company, it deals a lot with sponsorship. For years 'Kalev' has been a contributor to Estonian sport and the Olympic movement. It has also sponsored children's and youth sports, donating a lot of candy. In addition the 'Kalev' sports association is the biggest in Estonia. The two Kalev's work closely together; for several years Kalev's walking

series 'We walk together!' has been held to encourage people to be more active. The chocolate company and physical activity have been mixed up in people's minds, so that no one finds this problematic, not even the fact that they reward children with sweets for walking different distances. It seems as if Estonian children would not even move without seeing a reward full of sugar and fat.

Many other manufacturers of sweets support physical activities for children. It is hard to fight this kind of action, because nobody wants to stand against their benefactor. This kind of marketing trick is so common in Estonia that the companies do not even need much advertising in the media. They get their publicity jointly with things going on and compared to all family activities, TV seems quite innocent.

### The activities of the Estonian Heart Association

Since 2001 the Estonian Heart Association has tried to raise children's consciousness. We have published a series of ten books that teach children the concept of balanced nutrition through playful activities. Based on the great interest on this matter, close cooperation with kindergartens and schools can be considered fruitful. We also stress the importance of physical activity.

With the project on Children and Obesity and Avoidable Chronic Diseases, we are trying to make people think more about what is going on around us. So far the floor is held by the marketing people, who are interested in maintaining their position, giving the children education on media and trying to deny their part in forming the children's attitude. It is our task to create a wider discussion; its results can be analysed later.

# Unhealthy food marketing and childhood obesity concerns rising in Finland

A number of different initiatives and activities aimed at children and obesity are run by the Finnish Heart Association (FHA), working alone or together with other stakeholders. It seems that the real truth has been recognised: Overweight and obesity are an increasing problem among Finnish children and adolescents.

### **The launch of the report "The marketing of unhealthy food to children in Europe"**

A press conference was held on 4 May 2005 in Helsinki to launch the report on "The marketing of unhealthy food to children in Europe." The purpose was to open a public debate in Finland on the recommendations made in the Report.

FHA's president Pekka Puska expressed concerns about the increase in obesity in children and young people. In Finland, 15 to 20% of youngsters over ten years old are overweight. During the last 20 years the number of overweight children has tripled. According to Pekka Puska, the current marketing of soft drinks and confectionery partly explains the overweight and obesity among children. He therefore demands the removal of vending machines containing unhealthy food and drink products from schools and proposes the distribution of berries and fruits as an alternative. These should be available on a daily basis.

Matti Rajala, Head of Unit from the European Commission Directorate on Public Health, went on to say that "there is a big concern of childhood obesity throughout Europe and Commissioner

Markos Kyprianou has raised obesity to one of the most important health challenges in Europe". Marjaana Lahti-Koski from FHA outlined the role the Finnish Heart Association can play in tackling this problem. Anna-Liisa Rajala, Finnish coordinator of the EHN Project on Children and Obesity, talked about the conclusions of the CHOB Report on the Marketing of Unhealthy Food to Children. She highlighted specific Finnish challenges in food marketing targeted at children. The media coverage of the subject was very good, with interviews on national television and the radio and many articles published in newspapers and magazines.

### **Governmental opinions and support**

Minister Hyssälä from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is concerned about increased overweight and obesity among children and young people. Hyssälä said that teaching healthy eating habits is primarily the parents' responsibility. However, schools also have a crucial role to play, and schools and families combined must challenge the food industry in the development of healthy foods for children.

The minister also mentioned the effect of vending machines containing unhealthy food and drink products in schools. According to Hyssälä the machines are not the major cause of obesity, but they defeat the purpose of health education at schools. She proposes that the school committees start thinking about the possibility of removing the machines from schools and providing healthier snacks.

Minister Haatainen from the Ministry of Education underlines that the school environment should encourage children's health. Selling of sugary drinks and confectionery should be part of the cooperation between schools and parents. More and healthier choices should be available.

### **Media debate**

Professor Pekka Puska's interview in the regional newspaper "Aamulehti" (November 2004) initiated a national debate in Finland about children's obesity and food marketing to children. The initial purpose of the interview was to ask Puska's opinion about the British Government's plans to prohibit "junk food" advertising to children. Puska mentioned in the interview that childhood obesity is a problem in Finland. The food industry has to accept its responsibilities. He also mentioned that the responsibility for children's healthy nutrition is shared between home, school, the food industry and the whole community. He proposed that food vending machines should be removed from schools.

A national newspaper "Helsingin Sanomat" responded with quite a critical editorial, mentioning terms like health terrorism etc. The morning television's response was more positive and many readers sent their personal opinions to "Helsingin Sanomat". This clearly showed that Finnish parents in particular and the Finnish population in general are ready to act on food marketing to children.

### **A platform for debate**

The Children's Health Forum ("Forum") continues as a platform for open conversation and the development of collaboration. The purpose of the Forum is to increase the well-being of children and young people, using as starting points the basic factors of daily life in families with children: nutrition, physical activity, rest and joy. Its primary objective is to give support to parents and professional educators and health workers, while keeping the main target in mind: children and young people themselves.

The Forum organised two workshops in April and June 2005 on the theme of the prevention of children's overweight. The workshops concentrated on psychology, physical activity, nutrition and food marketing to children. The first one was targeted primarily at the people working with children and the second at the Forum's members. The FHA and the Children and Obesity project have played an active role in the planning and implementation of the workshops.

### **The Finnish Heart Association commits to action on obesity**

The Finnish Heart Association has produced the new Action Plan for Promoting Finnish Heart Health (2005-2011). The Plan focuses on health promotion during different phases of the life cycle: childhood, youth, working-age and ageing. Among children and young people the Plan's aim is to support a healthy lifestyle to grow old. A very detailed action plan is already available. Now the greatest challenge is to encourage young people to choose healthy lifestyles.

### **Consumer Agency - a very important player in tackling marketing of unhealthy food to children**

The tasks of the Consumer Agency & Consumer Ombudsman are to ensure consumers' economic, health and legal position and to implement consumer policy. The Director General of the Consumer Agency serves as the Consumer Ombudsman, who is responsible for monitoring compliance with legislation

concerning the protection of consumers' rights. Marketing aimed at children is restricted with the "Minors, Marketing and Purchase" guidelines (2004) produced by The Consumer Agency & Ombudsman. These guidelines will soon be complemented by the rules of the game for food marketing aimed at children. The Rules, targeted primarily at advertisers, will be ready for use in September 2005.

In April 2005 the Consumer Agency organised a seminar "Dangerous goodies? Viewpoints of food marketing to children". The main topics of the seminar were: who has the decision making power, good manners in advertising, marketing methods, a health viewpoint, and what about the future? Practically sold out, the seminar sparked a lively and active debate. However, important questions for the future remain unanswered: is current legislation enough? How can responsibilities be shared fairly? Should we head for a total ban on food advertising or for joint responsibility? Many more debates will follow in Finland on this subject.

# Europe is gaining weight... overview of the situation in France

France is gaining weight. The number of overweight children is continuously increasing, to the point that currently there are five times as many obese children as there were 40 years ago. The proportion of overweight including obesity has reached 15.7%. According to the standards of the International Obesity Task Force, 12.4% of all fourth-year pupils (age 9-10) are overweight and 3.3% are obese.

There are of course regional differences in the statistics. While the north and the east of France record the highest rates, other regions also report percentages above the national average, such as Corsica and Provence-Côte-d'Azur, where 17% of all children are overweight, followed by 16.6% for the Paris region. The poorest people are worst hit by this public health problem. But it is not so much income as the level of education which counts.

### Eating habits, activity levels both require attention

While eating habits are obviously the main cause of overweight, the sharp drop in sports activities is another important culprit. According to the results of the INCA survey<sup>1</sup>, 85% of all children aged 3 to 14 are involved in sports at school (53% do two hours per week, 44% do from two to four hours per week), but nearly half of all girls and one-quarter of all boys have no physical activity outside school. In contrast, 11% of all children watch television for more than two hours per day and this percentage rises to 41% on Wednesdays (when school is half a day) and to 46% during the weekend. Granted, these percentages have improved since 2003, but only because children are switching to multimedia activities, including game consoles, DVDs and the Internet!

### Initiatives to reduce the weight of France's children

Public and private organisations have implemented the following measures to prevent and drive back this epidemic.

- Several legislative measures have been adopted to comprehensively address this "adipose tidal wave". Article 30 of the Framework Law on Public Health of 9 August 2004 specifies that commercial vending machines for beverages and snacks are prohibited in schools with effect from 1 September 2005. Article 29 of the same law imposes a 1.5% tax on all television and radio commercials for children that do not incorporate a health message. This applies to beverages and foods with added sugar, salt or synthetic sweeteners. The proceeds of this tax will go to the Institut National de Prévention et d'Education pour la Santé (National prevention and health education institute), which will use it to finance preventive messages and advertising that promotes a healthier diet. The government is preparing a regulation imposing nutritional labels on foods (adaptation of Directive 90/496/EC - DGCCRF<sup>2</sup>). According to this regulation, manufactured foods would have to display the number of calories, the percentage of saturated and non-saturated acid fats and the sodium content in each serving;
- As part of France's nutritional policy drive, the Programme National Nutrition Santé - PNNS (National Health Nutrition Programme) continues to campaign for healthier eating habits among adults and children, urging a daily intake of at least five fruits and vegetables. The report entitled "Situation et évolution des apports alimentaires de la population en France, 1997-2003" [Situation and changes in food intake of the French population, 1997-2003] notes that children consume fewer than four fruits and vegetables per day. The other pillar of this policy is the programme to promote intensive daily physical activity for at least 30 minutes: "La santé vient en bougeant" [Stay healthy by moving] ([www.mangerbouger.fr](http://www.mangerbouger.fr));
- INPES<sup>3</sup>, a public institution, has published a manual entitled "La santé vient en mangeant et en bougeant: guide

nutrition des enfants et des ados pour tous les parents" [Stay healthy by eating and moving: a nutritional guide for all parents with young and adolescent children] accompanied by a booklet for health care professionals;

- In conjunction with the bakery and other food sectors, the PNNS conducts actions designed to reduce the salt content in certain foods. The PNNS combines the distribution of fruits at primary and secondary schools with educational actions and is testing tools at a number of schools to help children decipher food advertising;
- The EPODE<sup>4</sup> programme, a five-year plan for the entire population designed to halt the increase in child obesity, was awarded the PNNS logo for its 2004-2005 campaigns: "La saison a le goût des légumes" [The season has the taste of vegetables], "La saison a le goût des féculents" [The season has the taste of feculents] and "La saison a le goût du lait et des produits laitiers" [The season has the taste of milk and dairy products]. In EPODE-partner cities, these messages are passed on to the consumer by means of datasheets, guidelines and posters, while a letter is faxed to health care professionals;
- The Fleurbaix Laventie Ville Santé III campaign<sup>5</sup> (Observatoire des habitudes alimentaires et du poids - [Observatory for food habits and weight]) has entered its third stage, a "health coaching" programme; as part of this programme 3,000 people are helped to improve their diet by nutritionists after an individual medical examination. Schools organise nutritional programmes, such as the "10 o'clock snack" launched in application of a directive from the Ministry for National Education. Other nutritional campaigns are conducted with the assistance of the Association pour la Prise en Charge et la Prévention de l'Obésité en Pédiatrie (APOP [Association for the Treatment and Prevention of Obesity in Paediatrics]).

Consumers make their own contributions through such organisations as UFC-Que Choisir [What to choose] and 60 Millions de Consommateurs [60 million consumers] and through associations for obese people. They hold the food industry responsible for this scourge: they are demanding genuine commitments, asking the authorities to call a halt to marketing strategies that prompt consumers to buy excessively rich foods, and lobbying for French and European regulations.

Le Bureau de Vérification de la Publicité (BVP) the advertising industry watchdog, has drafted recommendations on eating habits among children (Article 8 of the Rules of Professional Conduct for Advertising) in order to strengthen the self-discipline of advertisers. Meanwhile, the Association Nationale des Industries Alimentaires (ANIA [National Food Industry Association]) has also put the problem of obesity on its agenda.

Bowing to the claims and the pressure, certain food industry organisations have begun to initiate campaigns to improve consumption. This is easier with some products than others. For instance, L'Agence Pour la Recherche et l'Information en Fruits et Légumes Frais (APRIFEL [Agency for research and information on fresh fruits and vegetables]) has launched "Fresh Week" (June 2005) to promote the consumption of fresh vegetables. Danone Institute provides health professionals with a series of tools to help detect and prevent child obesity. This corpulence programme, launched under the slogan "Fat Chance for the Future of Obese

Children...", aims to make parents aware of the importance of monitoring the corpulence of their children and of the need for a healthy life style, and forges a dialogue with doctors regarding the prevention of overweight in little children.

In October 2004, the food industry participated in the Week of Taste. Traditionally, the purpose of this event has been to educate consumers, to promote the production and preparation of safe foods, to provide transparent information and helpful tips about the origin of foods and to encourage healthy eating habits. There is a question, however, as to who really benefits from this event.

#### **Radical measures are called for**

The authorities will only be able to put France on a diet by taking drastic action. Even though many organisations are campaigning actively and even though the food industry is on the defensive, how can we cope otherwise with the vast resources of the industrial lobby? Before the battle is lost, let's help David beat Goliath. Overweight is not only unfashionable, it is a heavy burden and jeopardises one's health. Diabetes is a frequent side-effect of overweight. This is more than enough reason for the Fédération Française de Cardiologie, the French Cardiology Federation, which has always advocated a balanced diet and opposed an inactive lifestyle, to continue its actions and to urge young people to remain slim, in order to make sure today's children do not become tomorrow's cardiac patients.

*\*Partly financed by the municipalities (for local actions) and partly by private partners, currently Nestlé, APS - Assureurs Prévention Santé (Groupement des Assureurs Santé Français) and various local partners (for local campaigns).*

*\*\* The **Fleurbaix Laventie Ville Santé** study was conducted with the support, assistance and exceptional collaboration of: CEDUS, Go Sport, Fournier Pharma, Roche, Lesieur and Nestlé France.*

<sup>1</sup> Etude Individuelle et Nationale sur la Consommation Alimentaire (Individual and national studies of food consumption).

<sup>2</sup> Direction Générale de la Concurrence, de la Consommation et de la Répression des Fraudes (General Directorate for Competition, Consumer Affairs and Fraud Control).

<sup>3</sup> Institut national de prévention et d'éducation pour la santé (National institute for the prevention of diseases and for health education).

<sup>4</sup> Ensemble Prévenons l'Obésité Des Enfants (Let's join hands to prevent obesity in children).

# Food marketing to children in Germany

In Germany, the increasing incidence of overweight in children is being noted with growing concern. About 20% of all children are overweight, and 8% of them are obese. In parallel to this alarming development, the marketing of calorie-rich foods to children is booming.

At precisely the times when children watch a great deal of television - at weekends, in the afternoon or early evening - the rate of advertisement of calorie-rich foods is particularly high. For example, a study performed in 1999 recorded up to 20 advertising spots per hour at weekends for food mostly rich in fat and sugar for the private TV station RTL. The majority of the products advertised were candies or crisps. Often, high-calorie products are promoted as healthy, but their milk content is generally overvalued, starch is designated as healthy cereal grains, and the content of sugars and energy is either not disclosed or quite simply concealed.

### The nature of food marketing

The food industry is inventive in stimulating children's appetite for their products. The industry uses aspects of children's culture like movies and their characters or core needs like friendship, success or power to attract young consumers. Food marketing is dominated by TV advertising. In 2003, TV advertising amounted to 87 percent of the total expenditure for food marketing. The expenditure for Internet advertising was generally low. However, a study by the Research Institute of Child Nutrition in 2003 shows the growing importance of this media. Two-thirds of the companies surveyed producing so-called children's food used the Internet for marketing in

general. Half of them appealed especially to children with a mix of games and direct advertising.

In a climate of relaxation of state school laws and decreasing educational funds, the school environment has grown as a promotional channel for advertisers in Germany. For example, new strategies include token collection promotions: with the purchase of food products from companies such as Bahlsen and Kellogg's, class account books for school trips or school sports equipment can be obtained.



[www.neufferdesign.de](http://www.neufferdesign.de)

According to the Federation of German Consumer Organisations (vzbv), the companies have to accept that advertising has no place in the class room or school yard. In 2004, the Federation of German Consumer Organisations sued Kellogg's on the grounds of the above mentioned marketing action. However, the Court (Landgericht Bremen) reasoned that since the Kellogg's marketing action did not ask schools or teachers directly to lobby for their products, it could not be accounted to the defendant if in single cases schools or teachers supported the Kellogg's action. Therefore the case was dismissed.

### Regulation of food marketing

In Germany, the legal basis for protection against negative impacts of advertising is largely based on the Competition Regulation Act (UWG) and a code with specific rules for food marketing (LMBG). According to the LMBG advertising for food with misleading descriptions and statements is prohibited. This is already the case if a false impression of the product is caused. In theory, this applies to many high calorie food products for children which are given a healthy image because milk or supplements like calcium or vitamins are added. However, it is most likely that current jurisdiction will dismiss the argument of misleading marketing: it generally assumes that the ordinary consumer is well enough informed not to be misled by this kind of advertising.

Since 2003 there has been a new statutory code covering marketing to children and adolescents in broadcasting as well as in all electronic media including the Internet. It is broadly based and covers almost all areas. However, no particular reference to food marketing is made and there is no code specifically covering food marketing to children.

### Controversial attitudes

The views and opinions about the issue of food marketing to children are controversial. Whereas German consumer protection organisations and nutrition experts demand better protection against marketing strategies, the food industry claims that children are already comprehensively protected by statutory as well as voluntary regulations.

The Federation of German Consumer Organisations (vzbv) welcomes the EU proposals and the current unanimous vote of the EU Council of Ministers on nutrition and health claims. In particular, the organisation supports the suggested ban on health claims for foods with a poor nutrition profile. The German Minister for Consumer Protection, Renate Künast, also calls for more stringent rules and appeals to the responsibility of all those involved, including the food industry. Being concerned about decreasing revenues, the latter, together with the marketing industry, is opposed to the EU plans. The umbrella organisation of the German Marketing Industry (ZAW) argues that food marketing as a reason for overweight is largely overestimated, and that the real causes are socio-economic factors, genetic disposition and lack of physical activity.

### Counterbalancing measures

Only a few programmes, such as some of the German consumer advice centres, have been introduced with the special intention of counterbalancing the negative

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effects of food marketing. More often, preventive projects are initiated with the aim of avoiding overweight through a different lifestyle. For example, the government campaign "Kinderleicht" includes educational and physical activities as well as fruit and vegetable promotion. Since its start in 2003, specific measures in the area of nutrition in schools, the family, kindergartens and day care centres have been promoted in collaboration with the German Society for Nutrition (DGE), consumer organisations and other partners.



[www.neufferdesign.de](http://www.neufferdesign.de)

"Kinderleicht" also includes activities in the area of marketing, but they are not the focus of the campaign.

The food industry has its own projects with an emphasis on physical activity, which from its point of view is the key factor for the prevention of overweight. Often, these projects are run with a major effort and public appeal. Some companies produce teaching materials. Even though this is not direct product marketing, children may be influenced indirectly, for example by logo or content.

### Plans for the future

The focus of the newly founded "Plattform Ernährung" (Nutrition platform) - a broad based alliance of various players in the field including the government - is on prevention. Existing projects are to be promoted and linked in networks, and new activities are to be initiated.

Another planned activity is the launch of a new study ("Verzehrstudie") monitoring nutrition behaviour and nutrition trends. Like the current report "Lebensmittelwerbung für Kinderprodukte" (Food marketing for children's products, financed by the Federal Ministry for Consumer Protection) the new study will enable better prevention of childhood obesity.

### Conclusion

There are already several initiatives and projects in the field of nutrition and children. But for a comprehensive change in children's diet, legal regulations of food marketing have to be improved. This includes a ban on health claims for unhealthy food and more explicit rules that do not leave room for diversity in interpretation.



# The marketing of unhealthy food to Greek children

Although the increasing prevalence of obesity among children is an issue of profound importance for all the European countries, it seems to be of particular significance for the Greek population. This was the main reason our Heart Foundation decided to join the Children, Obesity and Associated Chronic Diseases Project of the European Heart Network (EHN).

In the European CVD statistics, published in 2005 by the EHN and the British Heart Foundation, Greece ranked second regarding the prevalence of overweight children. Furthermore, in contrast to some of the Northern European countries, there is an obvious lack of regulations that could potentially confront the overwhelming marketing of unhealthy foods to children. Moreover, the consumer organisations have not been particularly focused on the hazardous effects of unhealthy food marketing aimed at children.

### Special features of Greece's situation

Apart from the obvious influence of unhealthy dietary patterns that have been promoted by the food industry, there are some special characteristics that partially explain the current situation in Greece. Despite the increasing prevalence of cardio-vascular risk factors in the population, the incidence of cardiovascular diseases remains relatively low. Thus, cardiovascular mortality is still low and life expectancy is among the highest in Europe. The well-known pattern of the

so-called Mediterranean diet partially counteracts the adverse effects of unhealthy food products, which have been massively advertised during the last few decades. The close relations among the members of Greek families used to protect children from unhealthy foods because of the traditional gathering of the whole family for the main meals.

What has happened during the last twenty years that could possibly explain the current situation? Firstly, the function of family life has dramatically changed due to the rapidly increasing participation of women in economic life and the intensified rhythm of life in the current competitive socioeconomic environment. This situation created the necessary space for the unhealthy food marketing to develop into a fast growing part of the economy. Almost unknown 20 years ago in Greece, the fast-food epidemic is omnipresent nowadays.

### Analysing the role of marketing

During Phase 1 of the EHN project, taking into consideration the special characteristics of our population, we examined the role of marketing of unhealthy foods to children in the genesis of the problem of children's obesity in our country. We soon discovered that the key issue is the lack of consensus on principles and definitions, which did not and possibly will not allow the appropriate implementation of regulations necessary to control marketing of unhealthy foods to children. Briefly, there is no definition

regarding foods consumed by children, which are high in fat, sugar or salt, nor is there any definition for unhealthy foods in general. The governmental organisation responsible for the quality control and marketing of foods (EFET) has created regulations only against unsafe foods, and in particular there are no specific regulations aiming to protect children's health. Furthermore, there are no specific rules to protect children from aggressive and sometimes misleading advertisement of unhealthy food products.

TV dominates the advertisement of foods in Greece. Indicative of TV's leading role is the fact that in Greece, out of the total amount of 1050 million euros spent on advertisements during the first six months of 2004, 429.4 million euros (40.75%) were spent on TV advertisements. In addition, previous studies have shown that Greek children's TV viewing habits may contribute to poor educational achievement and to obesity. The synergistic effects of reduced physical activity and exposure to advertisement of unhealthy foods that are related to TV watching could explain the current epidemiological situation of children's obesity in the country.

Motivated by the lack of adequate research in the field, we performed our own research in the cinema theatres of Athens, where we discovered that practically all the food that can be bought there by children could be characterised as unhealthy. Unhealthy food and limited choices is, obviously, a dangerous combination for children.



### Looking at the schools

The school environment is well protected in Greece. Vending machines and unhealthy foods are not allowed in schools. The ministry of education has announced the publication of a catalogue of healthy foods that can be sold to students. However, shops close to schools have undertaken the role of promoting unhealthy food choices to children and there is no regulation to protect the children from this apparent hazard. Regarding the Internet's role in the marketing of unhealthy food, although the total impact of the Internet on total consumption of foods by children is still limited, a barrage of commercials was launched recently over the World Wide Web through spam e-mails and game groups, where parental control is difficult.

Conclusively, the situation in Greece calls for action. Campaigns should aim not only to stop marketing of unhealthy foods to children, but also to promote physical activity and a healthier lifestyle. The good health of the next generation should be an issue of first priority for our societies. The EHN project contributed to our understanding of the magnitude of the problem. Given the complex interactions between societies and economies in the European Union, it is obvious that only measures undertaken at the European level could drastically change the current situation, where marketing of unhealthy foods to children is practically uncontrolled.

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# The fight against childhood obesity in Hungary

The dangers of the growing epidemic of childhood obesity are being more widely recognised in Hungary. Food in schools is the area currently being addressed by organisations promoting action to deal with this threat to children's health.

### Studying school vending machines

This year many promising developments occurred in the regulation of school canteens and vending machines. KOTHALO ([www.kothalo.hu](http://www.kothalo.hu)), a network of civil society organisations that promotes environmental protection, issued an important guideline for ecological consumer protection in the schools that dealt extensively with the effects of advertisements on children and aspects of children's consumer behaviour in school kiosks earlier.

This year KOTHALO released the results of a study conducted on vending machines in 630 schools. In 53% of the larger schools there is at least one machine. Most school directors are not aware of the dangers of these machines to education about healthy lifestyles. Vendors in some smaller locations even managed to convince municipalities to instruct school directors to accept the machines.

However, in some cases, parental organisations have successfully prevented the deployment of vending machines. There is very little regulation of the products sold through the machines.

Most experts agree that vending machines may not be the most important contributors to children's obesity, but the present product selections diminish the positive messages of an education in healthy eating. Nevertheless, the canteen issue is far from over as the hot summer is likely to be followed by a heated autumn. The government plans to launch two regulations to set a standard for schools canteens and to control the content of vending machines in schools.

### Possible regulations concerning foods in schools

In the early spring the Ministry of Education disclosed its agenda to regulate the availability of food products in schools. Initially the government planned more radical steps to regulate foods on offer in the school canteens by a compulsory directive. This announcement sparked an intense debate throughout the media and professional organisations.

EFO SZ – the Federation of Hungarian Food Industries – was the organisation that raised most concerns ([www.efosz.hu](http://www.efosz.hu)). In the summer EFO SZ contracted a public relations agency to coordinate the publicity work on the "kiosk issue". Earlier the agency had successfully launched a website called "Sweet Facts" that promotes confectionery and sweets. EFO SZ argued that the differentiation between "healthy" and "unhealthy" foods is inappropriate as these terms are relevant

only for the whole diet. They also stated the virtue of "freedom of choice", where all kinds of products are available to consumers.

In this context the scarcity of "healthy" food products in school kiosks was due to the preferences of the consumers, they argued. However, the industry representatives expressed their willingness to better inform students and the general public about up-to-date nutritional principles and also to promote a physically more active lifestyle. The industry opts for self-regulation instead of any type of ban. Minister of Education Bálint Magyar pointed in his response to concerns from the industry that "limitation of the present offer may also be regarded as an opportunity for an expansion of product range if the industry recognises the new demand of one million consumers in schools."

In May, the Office of the Public Health Commissioner, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education jointly issued a call for competition for the title of "Children Friendly Canteen". Schools that wish to apply must follow the guidelines of the National Institute for Food Safety and Nutrition (OETI), implementing the recommendations not only in school canteens but in vending machines and school catering. As Commissioner Kökény stated, "Schools must become promoters of health". In one Budapest school, where the new recommendations were readily



adopted, the daily sales were not affected, and children quickly became accustomed to the new product selections.

### **OETI recommendations**

At the peak of the debate, the OETI has adopted a set of criteria for food products in school canteens and school vending machines ([www.nepegeszseg.net](http://www.nepegeszseg.net)). The recommendation states the four most important tasks in providing for healthy development for children in schools:

- hygiene;
- healthy eating;
- daily physical exercise, and
- activities that enhance the development of a healthy personality.

The paper, released in the Ministry of Health's official journal in August, gives recommendations for 18 categories of food products, specifying sugar, fat and salt content for a number of food product groups. It bans preservatives in fruit and vegetable juices and forbids the addition of biologically active substances, like caffeine, to soft drinks. The preamble of the recommendation is a summary for parents, who will be key players in the success of this initiative, as parents' organisations in schools will be requested to monitor the offers of the schools kiosks.

"We have no dispute with the industry", said Annamária Somhegyi, from the Ministry of Health, one of the authors of the recommendations, "as we do not intend to ban certain products in schools, but

rather ratios of basic ingredients. It is then up to the keepers of the canteens to make their own selection within the set of recommendations."

Some regarded the recommendations as a step back from the earlier plans for a directive. The recommendations may become equally effective. In the new regulation planned by the Ministry of Education for this autumn, the content of foods offered in the machines must be in line with the OETI recommendations. Parental organisations and student boards must agree to the presence of any machines, and have a right to consent to any new or renewed contract on school canteens and vending machines.





# Confronting childhood obesity in Iceland

Increasing overweight and obesity is a growing problem among children and adults alike in Iceland. Everything points in the direction that this increase in weight in Icelandic children is a combination of increased availability of high energy, unhealthy food, increased food intake and less physical activity.

In an Icelandic survey<sup>1</sup> done on 9-year-old children by examining school health records between 1919 and 1998 it was shown that rates of overweight have gone from less than 1% in boys and just over 3% in girls in 1938 up to 17.9% and 19.7% in boys and girls respectively in 1998. Likewise, obesity has gone from being nearly non-existent to just under 5% in both 9-year-old boys and girls over the same time period.

### Prohibiting the advertising of unhealthy foods

In Iceland the survey "The Marketing of Unhealthy Food to Children in Europe" showed that there is an awareness of the vulnerability of children which is reflected in Icelandic law and rules pertaining to advertising to children. The Icelandic Competition Law includes clauses on advertising aimed towards protecting

children, defined as people under 18 years of age. The same can be said about the laws on broadcasting. These laws are very much in line with those seen in other Nordic countries, and Iceland is a part of the Competition and Fair Trade Authority and Consumer Representatives in the Nordic Countries with joint rules indicating the policy for television advertisements aimed at protecting children from advertising. In addition, there is a voluntary code of practice for the Icelandic Association of Advertising Agencies which includes clauses for the protection of children. Furthermore, the Education Council in Reykjavik reiterates that advertisements or promotion of activities and services from associations or companies may not be distributed in the City's elementary schools.

### Promoting healthy eating

The Marketing of Unhealthy Food to Children in Europe survey in Iceland also found that there are some activities under way aimed at promoting the eating of healthy food. The Icelandic Nutrition Council with the Icelandic Heart Association and the Icelandic Cancer Society have been promoting fruit and vegetable consumption (five a day) in

the population from the age of two years and up since 1996.

A very successful entertainment programme, Lazy Town, was launched in Iceland aimed at improving children's diet and increasing fruit and vegetable consumption through games and play. This programme was exported to the US where it became a great success.

The report on "The Marketing of Unhealthy Food to Children in Europe" has been translated into Icelandic and was introduced in late summer 2005 in conjunction with an initiative to fight obesity in children. Over the last year there has been a great awareness of increased obesity as a major health problem for children and adults in Icelandic society. As a result the Public Health Institution has launched country-wide surveys and initiatives on childhood obesity in schools in collaboration with local authorities throughout Iceland.

There have been a number of statements from governmental health authorities, and the Medical Director of Health in Iceland has identified obesity, particularly in children, as the number one health problem in Iceland.

<sup>1</sup> Brynhildur Briem, Height and weight of 9-year-old school children in Reykjavik 1919-1998, Reykjavik 1999, University of Iceland, Ph.D Thesis.

# Children and obesity

Following the launch of the European Heart Network report on "Marketing of Unhealthy Food to Children in Europe", chief executive of the Irish Heart Foundation Michael O'Shea said "this report highlights our concerns about the lack of regulation of marketing directed at children in Ireland. The Irish Heart Foundation will shortly be making strong recommendations on this issue to Government."

The Irish Heart Foundation warmly welcomed the report and urged immediate action. Mr O'Shea indicated that "there is a growing and worrying trend towards obesity in Ireland and elsewhere. It is widely acknowledged that this is a societal problem, where many players have a role in tackling this problem. Taking appropriate steps to deal with the marketing of unhealthy food to children is an important element in our overall response".

### Obesity in Irish children increasing as in other countries

Recently published data in Ireland show that 9% of 5 to 12-year-old boys and 13% of girls are obese, and 11% of boys and 12% of girls are overweight. This study also showed low intakes of fruit and vegetables with average intakes well below international recommendations for children; overall fat intake is higher than recommended - 40% of children exceed the recommendations - and daily salt intake is higher than the recommended levels<sup>1</sup>.

### Irish parents concerned about food marketing

A number of different surveys indicated a persistent concern about food marketing particularly on the part of those involved with children.



Professor Derek Yach, Head of Global Health at the School of Public Health, Yale University, USA and former Director of Chronic Disease at WHO, Geneva, was invited to Ireland by the Health Services Executive and the National Heart Alliance to lead a masterclass last March and to participate in a workshop with the National Heart Alliance to prepare a position paper on food marketing to children. Pictured: Chris Fitzgerald, Dept. of Health and Children; Jackie Crinnion, Health Services Executive - Office of Health Management; Professor Derek Yach; and Maureen Mulvihill, Irish Heart Foundation/National Heart Alliance.

A 2004 study showed that 75% of parents considered that TV food ads to children usually promote unhealthy foods<sup>2</sup>. Another study shows 75% of mothers would like to see limitations on food marketing<sup>3</sup> and a national survey indicates 56% of the public are concerned about food marketing<sup>4</sup>.

Limited research on the type and amount of food marketing to children is available in Ireland. In keeping with research elsewhere, a survey conducted by

Ireland's Green Party revealed that 54% of the advertisements during children's television programmes were for products high in fat, salt or sugar<sup>5</sup>.

### Strong industry sponsorship in Irish schools

Some examples of food and drinks companies sponsoring various sporting events in Irish schools include:

- Coca Cola sponsors a range of rugby events in schools in each province in the country;
- The Irish Schools Athletics Programme and the Kit Kat Parks Tennis Programme are sponsored by Nestle Ireland;
- Kelloggs sponsor schools rugby events in addition to basketball training camps and Primary Schools Activity Day;
- McDonalds sponsored a "Go Active" campaign, which aimed to introduce primary school children to traditional Irish sports such as hurling/camogie and Gaelic football.

### New regulation code for Irish broadcast media

Since January 2005, regulation of food marketing to children has been improved due to the implementation of the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland's Statutory Code on Advertising to Children. While the Code will improve the current situation in relation to advertising to children, the effects of this code are being undermined due to TV advertising via satellite from outside Ireland. In addition the Irish Heart Foundation and the National Heart Alliance also

<sup>1</sup> IUNA (2005) National Children's Food Survey. [www.iuna.net](http://www.iuna.net).

<sup>2</sup> Health Services Executive - Southern Area (2004). Our Children, Their Future, Why Weight?, HSE Southern Area.

<sup>3</sup> IAmarach Consulting & Edelman (2004) Mothers Opinion's Mean Something. [www.amarach.com](http://www.amarach.com).

<sup>4</sup> Safefood (2004) It's in your hands - Consumer Tracking Research. Food Safety Promotion Board, Dublin.

<sup>5</sup> D. De Burca (2003), Combating Child Obesity - Green Party Policy Position Paper, The Green Party, Dublin.

believe that the code:

- still exposes children to the marketing of foods high in fat (specifically saturated and trans fats), sugar and salt;
- does not take into account the cumulative effect of advertising on children;
- does not limit the number of food advertisements per segment or per day.

### **National Heart Alliance preparing response to EHN report**

The National Heart Alliance has representation from over 40 organisations in Ireland that have heart health as part of their remit. It was established by the Irish Heart Foundation under the European Heart Health Initiative, a project part-funded by the EU. In response to the increase in marketing of unhealthy foods to children, the National Heart Alliance has begun to consider recommendations for action and policies to address the impact of marketing on Irish children. This work is in its final stages and already over 30 organisations have signed up to a position paper on food marketing to children in Ireland. In a related area, the Alliance is also working on a position paper for policy makers on young people, physical activity and the environment, due to be published next year.

### **Raising the issue with policy makers**

Later this year, the National Heart Alliance is organising a briefing of all representatives of our Government (Oireachtas) and the media to raise the issues around food marketing to children and hopefully to initiate a meaningful national public debate. It is hoped that the Oireachtas Committee on Health and Children might look at this issue



An Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, who was presented with the report of the National Task Force on Obesity at Government Buildings by John Treacy, Chairman of the Taskforce and Minister of State, at the Department of Health and Children, Seán Power TD.

in the near future. A report from this significant government committee helped spearhead the move to Irish legislation in relation to passive smoking.

### **New Government report on tackling obesity**

"Obesity: The Policy Challenges" - a report of the National Task Force on Obesity - was launched after one year's deliberation in May 2005 by Ireland's prime minister, An Taoiseach Mr Bertie Ahern, T.D.<sup>6</sup>. The Irish Heart Foundation welcomed the report, but warned that "the Government must take immediate and cross-sectoral action to tackle the rapidly increasing problem of obesity; otherwise we will reverse the health gains of the last 20 years with the reduction in heart disease mortality."

### **Irish Heart Week, September 2005**

The Foundation's annual awareness campaign is maintaining a focus on improving the health of children and young people. The theme for the week is "A Child's Heart for Life" through active living and healthy eating. The week will be launched by the Minister of State at the Department of Health and Children, Mr Sean Power, T.D., on Friday, 23 September, at a national conference which will present the findings from the European Report as well as recent findings on the health and fitness of our young people. A resource is being developed to support parents with the challenging task of encouraging their children to be active and enjoy healthy eating.

<sup>6</sup> Department of Health and Children (2005) Obesity - The Policy Challenges: The report of the National Task Force on Obesity. Department of Health and Children, Dublin.

## Countering childhood obesity in Italy

According to the International Obesity Task Force (2003), the incidence of childhood obesity in Italy is extremely high: Italian children are the “chubbiest” in Europe with about 36% of children overweight and 10-12% obese. As well as in adult obesity, it has been observed that the incidence of childhood obesity tends to be higher in boys than in girls and that the North of Italy is worse off than the South. One percent of these children are expected to be already developing associated diseases, such as hypertension, high cholesterol or diabetes. The Italian Federation of Paediatricians has found that 4% of children aged 6 to 11 suffer from hypertension associated with overweight.

At present the Italian National Health System is spending 22.8 billion euros on obesity-related diseases, that is 6-7% of the total budget. This amount is expected to increase in the next few years due to the upwards trend in obesity especially in young people.

### **The root of the problem: marketing of unhealthy foods**

Since 2004, the debate about the epidemic of childhood obesity and its determinants has been at the top of the agenda of the whole national press. Although it is widely recognised that obesity is a disease with multiple factors, the Italian debate often emphasises the role of mass media and food marketing, which are blamed for their negative impact on children's eating habits. The data collected in 2004 by the

Italian Association for the Fight Against Thrombosis (ALT-Associazione per la Lotta alla Trombosi-Onlus) in the context of the European project on Children, Obesity and Associated Avoidable Chronic Diseases, show that children and young people are the favourite target for advertisers because they are regarded as “evolving consumers” with a potential long-term faithfulness to the brand.

Italian literature on this subject shows that children are easily influenced by advertising and are more and more able to influence their family's food shopping: 81% of children aged 6-13 pester their parents to buy a particular food and 69% consume a product for which they remember the commercial.

### **Television commercials are especially influential**

Research in Italy shows that 20% of all TV commercials are directed to children, and 26% of all commercials (to any targets) advertise food, 70% of which represent “unhealthy” food (i.e. high in fat, sugar or salt). In particular, 49% of commercials broadcast during children's programmes advertise “unhealthy” food (but the percentage goes up again to 70% if we include foods that are high in salt), while only 2% is dedicated to fruits and vegetables. As far as mass media are concerned, television is still the favourite channel for companies investing in advertising, although the Internet and other innovative marketing channels (marketing in schools, via sms,

sports sponsorships, etc.) seem to be growing fast. The available data on the advertising through the Internet, schools and other new media is still scarce; however, food advertising on the Web increased by 30% between 2003 and 2004.

### **Countermeasures: (self) regulation vs. prevention**

Between 2004 and 2005 the great concern about the growing trend of childhood obesity stimulated several attempts to counterbalance obesity and the negative impact of food marketing to children. In Italy, regulation on the one hand, and education or prevention programmes on the other, have been the main counterbalancing measures.

In July 2004, the Italian Institute for Advertising Self Regulation (IAP) introduced a new clause in art. 11 (Children and adolescents) of its self-regulation code specifically aiming to protect young people from food advertising. However, the clause is extremely vague and only invites advertisers “not to downgrade the role of parents when indicating healthy eating habits” and “not to encourage unhealthy eating habits and lifestyles”. Furthermore, the code does not provide any real sanction: anybody can denounce an irregular commercial to the IAP Authority, which will then decide whether to withdraw the commercial from the market.

In terms of legislation, there is also the code "TV and minors", originally promoted by the Ministry of Communications as a voluntary code, aiming to protect children under 14 from TV broadcasting and advertising, but it does not specifically mention food advertising. Compliance with the code is monitored by a special Commission, but its sanction system is regarded as insufficient. The code provides three viewing times with three levels of protection for minors. For instance, it is forbidden to broadcast commercials which interrupt cartoons.

However, according to a study carried out in 2004 by Altroconsumo, a major Italian consumer association, most of the national TV channels constantly break the rules of the above code, which means that children are overexposed to advertising and food commercials during their programmes.

The national debate on childhood obesity has reflected different viewpoints according to the different subjects involved: industry and advertisers tend to prefer voluntary codes to legislation and encourage media literacy programmes for children; consumers argue for more restrictions on food marketing and for a better system of food labelling. The Ministry of Health has tried to tackle the problem with a wide mass media campaign on healthy lifestyles and by promoting the dialogue with the industry.

Federalimentare, the major Italian federation of food producers, along with the Ministry of Education has promoted a prevention programme aiming to encourage healthier lifestyles and especially more physical activity at school. The programme started in 2004 and involves 190 schools in four Italian regions where half an hour of physical activity a day will be added to the normal curriculum of one or two hours per week. ALT, as Italian coordinator of the European project "Children, Obesity and Associated Avoidable Chronic Diseases", has initiated a Platform against childhood obesity which brings together all the stakeholders that can contribute to fighting this epidemic: medical associations, scientific societies, the Government, consumers, industry and advertisers. All of them indicated they want to commit to formulating an integrated prevention programme. All the determinants of obesity will be tackled in this integrated approach: lack of physical activity, unbalanced diet, "unhealthy" food marketing, poor nutrition information to consumers, scarce availability of healthy food in schools, etc.

The members of the Platform met for the first time in May 2005, during a conference organised by ALT to disseminate the data of the "Children and obesity" project. Members are going to meet again in autumn 2005 in order to present the prevention programmes that they mean to implement in 2006 in their own fields of action.

# Food marketing to children and the regulatory environment in The Netherlands

In The Netherlands the growing prevalence of overweight in children has become an issue of great importance. The consumption of energy dense foods by children is an important factor in the onset of overweight. Several research and health organisations have linked heavy marketing of energy dense food products to the rising rate of overweight children.

Effective federal or self-regulating marketing guidelines may work preventively. For this reason an assessment of the regulatory environment in The Netherlands in this area was done by the Netherlands Heart Foundation. The assessment finished in January 2005 and consisted of a descriptive study and a series of interviews.

Research indicates that children are an attractive target group for marketing people. Children are targeted by child appealing techniques and at places

and at times especially known to attract children. Food groups like candy, fast food and crisps can be categorised as very appealing to children. Television advertising is the most popular medium used to reach children, although at this moment a multimedia approach and advertising via new media seem to be gaining ground.

Theoretically children can be influenced by marketing on the level of knowledge, attitude and behaviour. These effects can be on a short term or a long term basis. Furthermore, marketing can influence a person directly or via intermediate or societal levels. Research suggests that when it comes to food advertising, children are influenced at all of these levels. However, the total effect of food advertising on the individual child also depends on environmental and personal factors.

### Assessment of regulations

Currently children are protected against the influence of food advertising by federal legislation as well as self-regulatory codes. Relevant Dutch federal legislation is the media law. Self-regulatory codes include "De Nederlandse Reclame Code" which covers advertising in general; "De gedragscode van de voedingsmiddelenindustrie", a code of conduct for food marketing, and "Het sponsoringsconvenant voor scholen", on advertising in schools. Effective measures depend first of all on the content and the scope, but also on the procedures and the sanctions related to the legislation.

Assessment of the **existing regulation** in the area of marketing to children produced an overview of the strong and weak points of the different forms of regulation.

Children have their own television in their bedrooms.



- Strong points of the federal legislation include measures which reduce marketing, a quick redress system, neutrality of the complaint committee, active control and heavy sanctions;
- Weaknesses of the media law comprise the relatively limited scope, the absence of content-related rules and the lack of an obligation to address consumer complaints.

The strong and weak points of the different self-regulatory codes vary significantly between the different codes.

- Strengths of "De Nederlandse Reclame Code" are the inclusion of guidelines on the representation of confectionery in advertising, the broad applicability, the accessibility and the good communication of regulations about the fact that the code exists;
- Weak points of this code are the lack of rules aiming at decreasing marketing activities and addressing the use of effect-enhancing techniques. Furthermore, adherence to the guidelines is only monitored if someone complains, and an appeal costs money;
- Finally, "Het sponsoringsconvenant voor scholen" has a strong redress procedure and decreases marketing in schools. In addition, the committee which handles complaints is neutral;
- Weaknesses of this code include the lack of rules addressing effect-enhancing techniques, the limited scope of the guidelines and the lack of knowledge by parents of the procedures for redress.

### Interviews with the food industry

To determine the food industry's views on food marketing to children, eight interviews were conducted with key stakeholders in the food industry aiming at children. The interviews show that the respondents of the food industry are well aware of the problems associated with childhood obesity. In addition, the

relevant marketing self-regulatory codes are also well known.

The respondents perceive that children are a special group when it comes to food advertising, especially their ability to recognise advertising. Therefore, the respondents disapprove of hidden marketing techniques and misleading health claims aimed at children.

Although the respondents disapprove of misleading children they do not think marketing should be banned from children's lives. Marketing is seen as an integral part of modern life and it is preferable that children should learn to deal with it, rather than being sheltered from it. Premiums or other sales-stimulating techniques are therefore not seen as inappropriate.

The current state of advertising regulation is seen as sufficient. According to the industry, the new code of conduct on food marketing has improved the regulatory environment. However, most of the respondents admit that improvement of the self-regulatory codes should be actively pursued. When it comes to protecting children, self-regulation is seen as a better option than federal guidelines, and the idea of an extension of the legal regulation is rejected.

Cooperation between different parties such as government, industry and NGOs is seen as the most successful strategy for the prevention of childhood overweight and obesity. The industry stresses that it can contribute to solving the problem, but that it is not able to counter the trend on its own.

### Tightening the codes

Results of the literature research done in The Netherlands indicate that marketing of energy dense food probably has an effect on the eating habits of children. Because of the weaknesses of the current statutory

and self-regulatory rules, it can be concluded that existing legislation does not provide optimal protection for children in The Netherlands. The food industry seems to focus on decreasing the misleading aspects of advertising rather than on actually reducing the effects of food advertising. From the viewpoint of optimal protection of children the current regulation is far from sufficient.

In June 2005 the "Nederlandse Reclame Code" incorporated the "gedragscode van de voedingsmiddelenindustrie" into its self-regulatory code. The overall code has been adjusted (e.g. claims have to be scientifically justified and relevant) and the children's code also changed: advertising may not suggest that eating a certain kind of nutrition will give more status or popularity. In addition, children's role models cannot be used in radio or television ads aimed at children. Advertising in primary schools is forbidden. In secondary schools, promotional activities may not encourage over-consumption, and only small portions may be recommended.

At least a small step forward, but nevertheless the Netherlands Heart Foundation, the consumers organisation and the Nutrition Centre have joined forces to be able to change the regulatory environment in The Netherlands even more.



# Children and Obesity Project, results for Norway

As in the rest of Europe, childhood obesity in Norway has increased significantly. Today more than 75 000 Norwegian children are overweight. The average weight of 9 and 15-year-old children in Oslo has increased by approximately 3 kilos over the last 25 years, very largely caused by a less active lifestyle and over-consumption of food high in fat and sugar. Norwegian children are inactive on average 10 hours per day, and 80% of them eat and drink food with too much sugar daily. For example, Norwegian 13-year-old children drink on average 5 dl of sugared soft drinks every day.

### Food marketing to children

During the last few years there has been an explosion of marketing directed at Norwegian children. Today 95% of the children aged 5 to 7 know the branding Kellogg's cornflakes and 97% of the children know the Coca-Cola brand. In 1995 companies spent 7 million euros on sugar drink advertising, while today they use more than 14 million euros. Children encounter kids-designed advertising for unhealthy food on foreign TV channels, in cinemas, on the Internet and in children's magazines like Donald Duck, which 40% of the children read.

### Advertising on TV

The Norwegian national broadcasting act bans all kinds of marketing towards children (under 12 years old) on national TV channels and radio. The regulation covers items such as the time of the marketing, whether it is a product which especially attracts the attention of children, whether children participate in the marketing or whether the marketing industry uses presentations that especially appeal to children. Unfortunately these regulations do not target channels broadcasting from other countries. Older children are more and more watching programmes on other channels and are being exposed to "negative advertising".

### School

There have been numerous debates trying to ban advertising in schools. Today there are still no regulations, but most schools refuse to use school materials with "negative marketing", and advertising for unhealthy food like Coca Cola. McDonald's is almost never found in Norwegian schools. On the other hand, healthy brands like BAMA (fruit company) and Tine (distributor and experts on dairy products) have competitions, campaigns and offer the schools their materials.

### The Internet

Sixty percent of Norwegian children 13 to 15 years old use the Internet, which means that this medium is a popular place for advertisers to reach children. Marketing through the Internet is increasing, and this kind of marketing is probably the biggest challenge to control. Food marketing targeting children on the Internet is regulated by the Consumer Ombudsman's guidelines, which say that Internet marketing aimed at children should be presented in such a way that the children understand that it is in fact marketing they are looking at. Marketing of products to children should not be developed through games. But a new Nordic survey shows that much of the marketing towards children is a mixture of advertising and games - "hidden advertising" - which is against the Nordic Internet guidelines for children.

### Attitudes towards marketing

Luckily, advertising aimed at children is met with negative attitudes from children's organisations, parents' organisations and political organisations. And even though today there are few laws banning advertising aimed at children, Norwegian children are quite well protected compared with many other countries.

### How to handle the problem

There will probably not be a total ban on unhealthy food advertising to children in the near future. But different groups are working for a total ban on such advertising in schools and for the prohibition of advertising prior to children's movies in cinemas. School curricula also encourage schools to have programmes that teach children how to deal with commercial pressure.

Many measures have been taken or are being planned to prevent overweight among young people. There is a massive focus now on starting early to create healthy habits at a young age.

Other national measures to prevent childhood obesity:

- one hour of compulsory physical activity in school every day (this will start from September 2005 onwards);
- healthy school meals for all children in primary school;
- more education and school curricula that teach children about a healthy lifestyle;
- working towards banning vending machines in schools;
- reducing the availability of foods with high fat and sugar content in and near schools;
- better regulation and control of advertising on the Internet;
- working to reduce the price of fruit and vegetables and make fat and sugary foods relatively more expensive;
- introduction of a "Fruit and Vegetables Subscription" at all schools throughout the country;
- programmes which teach children what is in the food they eat;
- healthy profiles in kindergarten.

# Childhood obesity in Portugal

## A campaign by the Portuguese Heart Foundation

In Portugal, one in three children suffers from overweight or obesity. The Portuguese Heart Foundation therefore dedicated its activities during the month of May 2005 to the problem of childhood obesity. A high visibility campaign with posters and television spots appealing to parents and educators was developed. The poster, which shows three children - one of them overweight - says: "One in three children suffers from overweight and obesity".

The following message is written on the poster:

"A poor diet and lack of physical exercise are the main causes of excess weight in our country. It's no coincidence that one-third of children from 7 to 9 years of age are overweight. The first step that can be taken by parents and educators is to avoid giving children meals with too many calories and to include many vegetables and fruits in their eating habits. Children are also spending more time in front of the television or computer screen and lack physical activity. Excess weight has a negative impact on children's hearts. Parents have to do something about it. Prevention begins with physical exercise and a healthy diet."

In addition to the poster, the Portuguese Heart Foundation has also developed a television spot showing a child who rings the doorbell at a friend's house. He says his name into the intercom system, but his friend fails to identify him. The friend only realises who he is when the boy at the door gives his nickname, "Fatso." The same message as written on the poster is narrated in voiceover.

## Other organisations are joining in

Other organisations in Portugal are also active in the field of the fight against

obesity. The Portuguese Consumer Protection Association organised a seminar called "Childhood Obesity – A new epidemic". The political interest in the subject was shown by the fact that the Portuguese Health Minister participated in the seminar.

The consumer association also presented results from a study which they performed about advertising targeting children. The study covered the three main television channels in Portugal. One of them, RTP, is a public service that broadcasts about 20 hours of children's programmes per week and that airs about 3 hours of advertising.



SIC and TVI, the other two channels broadcast respectively 16 and 10 hours of children's programmes per week with about 2 hours of advertising. Of this advertising, food products take up 21% on SIC, 21% on TVI and 15% on RTP.

A detailed analysis reveals that most of the food products advertised consist of

chocolates, cereals with sugar and fast food. Most of the products advertised have a high sugar, fat and/or salt content, which are not very appropriate for a balanced diet.

## School food being approached

The seminar also covered the topic of food at schools and pointed out that parents too must take responsibility when they allow their children to eat meals inappropriate to a balanced diet. Much criticism was directed toward the proliferation of automated vending machines dispensing "unhealthy foods" in schools and the school establishment's lax attitude in this matter. Although the Ministry of Education has taken measures to equip schools with cafeterias where students can eat complete meals at a low cost, these are not always implemented.

The study revealed that when cafeteria management is outsourced to private companies, these offer menus based on specialised know-how. However, this is not the case at establishments whose cafeteria is managed by the school's own employees, who do not have the support of nutritionists. The excessive use of fried foods, especially chips, the systematic lack of vegetables and the lack of fruit in desserts are the most common complaints.

The seminar's excellent presentations, the clear concern by official bodies about the topic, as shown by the presence of the Minister of Health, and the media coverage of "childhood obesity" reinforced this year's message and increased the number of social partners and entities concerned with this new epidemic.

# The invaluable wealth of Slovenia is not oil and diamonds but the children

Numerous research studies have shown that unhealthy lifestyle factors (smoking, alcohol consumption, unhealthy food, lack of exercise) are among the primary initiators of the most important chronic diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, some types of cancer, chronic lung disease, osteoporosis and obesity. Whereas a great deal of research has been published on risk factors, much less is available on individual decision-making processes and the choices people make between a healthy and an unhealthy lifestyle, though some is now known about the actual influence of advertising on a vulnerable group like children. We should ask ourselves what legal regulations are in force in relation to advertising to children in an individual EU Member State and what citizens can do if they suspect these regulations are being violated.

The Inspectorate of the Republic of Slovenia for Culture and Media claims that the regulations of the Law on Media should be observed. In the provisions of Article 49 of said Law relating to advertising associated with children, the Law stipulates:

The advertisements mostly relating to children as the target audience, or in which children participate, should not contain any scenes of violence, pornography and other contents that could have a harmful effect on the health, mental and physical development of children or that could influence the children's susceptibility in any way. Advertising shall not morally or mentally harm children; advertisements should therefore not:

- stimulate children to purchase products or services by exploiting their inexperience and gullibility;
- stimulate children to persuade their parents or anybody else in the purchase of products or services;
- abuse the special confidence children have towards their parents, teachers or other persons;
- unjustifiably present children in dangerous circumstances.

In case of violation of any provision of this Article, citizens may report to the Inspectorate of the Republic of Slovenia for Culture and Media. Should an alleged violation have been committed in radio and television programmes, a report should be sent as soon as possible, because the broadcasters of radio and television programmes are obligated to keep the records of all programme contents for only fifteen days.

### Prevention through education

With the responsibility towards the young generation in mind, the Slovenian Heart Foundation issued a booklet entitled "Manj kilogramov, več zdravja" (Less kilograms, more health) in 2004. It is intended for parents, teachers and all those who care for children's nutrition. Its main goal is to increase the level of the culture of nutrition and to stimulate the citizens to do regular exercise.

The booklet was presented at a press conference that was a resounding success. The fact that the booklet has almost been sold out may be a sign that we are on the right track.

Participation in the EHN research project "Children, Obesity and Associated Avoidable Chronic Diseases" is one more thing that is interwoven in our everyday work. In this connection we first analysed the influence of advertising of unhealthy food on children and adolescents. We quite often came across advertisements in which a manufacturer of sweet and chocolate products claims the product is an ideal replacement for a snack or other meals. The research of Mateja Videčnik has shown that children spend as much as 41.7% of their pocket money on the purchase of sweets. Sweet pastries and cakes should not be presented either to children who enter the first year of primary school. Children can receive positive impressions especially in games including motive activity.

### Study on perception of advertising

In the second phase of our research we invited 44 organisations to reply to an international questionnaire on the risk of obesity and asked them to evaluate the seriousness of the topic. Thirty-two organisations filled in the questionnaire and as many as 67% of these institutions evaluated obesity of children and adolescents in Slovenia as a serious problem; 70% of the participants think that advertising on television, radio and in other media greatly influences the current consumer patterns of children and adolescents. Much less importance was given to advertising on the Internet, labelling of food and school education. Despite the fact that the people responsible in governmental and non-governmental institutions are well informed

about the influence of advertising of food on the behaviour of children, for the most part they do not have any strategies or measures that would lead to a decrease of harmful advertising. The majority of all organisations participating in our research indicate that schools play an important role in promoting healthy food or rather in stimulating parents and children to take part in more physical activity and to eat more healthy food of better quality. A lower level of initiative of the organisations was noted in concluding contracts with the food industry, in the enforcement of regulations that would diminish advertising, and in the introduction of control over the quality of food (for instance control of food quality in vending machines in schools).

Interestingly enough, 60% of the participants ranked the problem of obesity of children

among the priority tasks of our country. They stated that success in fighting against the negative influences of advertising is hindered by a lack of financial means. To a certain extent it is also hindered by the lack of expert knowledge and experience. The representatives of organisations agree that Slovenia should enforce more effective legislation in the field of advertising and promotion of food. The same amount of time should be spent for advertisements to the benefit of healthy nutrition as is now spent for the advertisement of unhealthy food.

The participants are of the opinion that the advertisements stimulating children to consume food containing high levels of sugar, fat and salt should be banned. The participants consider that the Government and its organisations

do not pay enough attention to the protection of children against advertising of food with high energy and low nutritional value.

The Slovenian Heart Foundation believes that, assisted by the international community, we will manage to change the principles of advertising. We are aware that our success depends on whether we can obtain the support of Slovene health care and school policy makers by enforcing new regulations. In this connection we should not forget that persistence, which is one of our virtues, has always yielded a return.



## Food marketing to children in Sweden

Following over a year's work at the Swedish Heart Lung Foundation on the Children and Obesity project, it can be stated that a great deal is being done in Sweden regarding children, overweight and marketing of food to children. At the time of the research performed in the framework of the EHN project during the summer of 2004 there was already a significant amount of material on the subject. Over the past year there has been very active debate in various quarters.

During this research phase, initial contacts were established with other organisations in Sweden that are working on the issue of food marketing to children and childhood obesity. During the subsequent year these contacts have become more and more frequent, and in spring 2005 they resulted in a national network focusing on marketing of food aimed at children. Until now this network has been informal, but joint measures in the form of seminars and possible publication of articles are planned for the autumn 2005.

The organisations active within the network - and which are thus very active in the fight against the marketing of unhealthy food to children in Sweden - are the Swedish Heart Lung Foundation, the National Swedish Institute of Public Health, the Stockholm Consumers' Cooperative Society and the Swedish Consumer Association. The other main authorities active in the field are the Swedish Ministry of Agriculture and the Swedish Consumer Agency.

### Influencing strong legislation

The Minister for Agriculture and Consumer Affairs, Ann-Christin Nyqvist, is heavily involved in the issue and often addresses the media, indicating the possibility of tougher legislation unless the advertising and food industries undertake effective self-regulatory measures. In March 2005 she organised a dialogue between the industry and organisations such as the Swedish Heart Lung Foundation - which is against marketing unhealthy food to children. A follow-up to this dialogue is planned for the beginning of September, when the Swedish Heart Lung Foundation will present the work on the Children and Obesity project.

"Ice cream fridge with window at child's - eye level"



### The impact of the Children and Obesity project

On 15 June 2005 a breakfast seminar was organised in Stockholm to launch the Children and Obesity project and its completed report. The media, various collaborating organisations and the advertising and food industries were invited. The seminar began with a paediatrician researching into children and diabetes in the south-east of Sweden. He clarified the enormous health catastrophe regarding overweight and its consequences which is now a reality for children in Sweden.

Then Janina Blomberg, national coordinator at the Swedish Heart Lung Foundation, presented the project and the Swedish law on the marketing of unhealthy food to children. TV advertising is not the biggest advertising threat for children in Sweden, since the law prohibits TV advertising aimed at children. However, this law applies to only one channel in Sweden (national television), and not to channels broadcasting from abroad. Still, most people in Sweden agree that thanks to the Swedish law, TV advertising aimed at children on other channels is not as aggressive as it is in many other countries. It is believed that the existing law may have influenced all the TV channels to take somewhat more responsibility than is the case in most other countries, where there is no such law. Furthermore, Swedish culture - in particular the importance of protecting children - has probably also had a positive influence on this.

Janina Blomberg's presentation also highlighted that, despite this, children in Sweden encounter a great deal of advertising in many other ways. The following are some examples:

- Product development - No one in the Swedish food industry has produced innovative new products that are healthy and aimed at children and used fun packaging to promote them. An enormous number of healthy products have recently been developed for adults, but as far as children are concerned all fun packaging in the shops is still filled with sweet and fatty products. All new snack products aimed at children still go against Swedish nutritional recommendations;
- Product placing - Unhealthy foods, often with fun packaging, are usually placed at child's-eye level in the shops. For example, this summer a new ice-cream refrigerator designed with a slant was used in some supermarkets. The lowest section is positioned so that a one-year old can look down into it, whereas fruits and vegetables are always positioned on counters that children cannot even see;
- Comics - Donald Duck, for example, contains advertising of sweets, crisps and pizza;
- The Internet - If 10-year-olds log on to Sweden's best-visited community site on the Internet they encounter customised

advertising for sugary drinks, crisps and pizza;

- Sponsoring - McDonalds, for example, organises jogging contests for children and Grandiosa Pizza sponsors a well-known football tournament for children;
- Direct advertising - Postal advertising, e.g. from ice cream companies, is obviously aimed at children. However the companies concerned claim that it is meant for the whole family, thus getting round the Swedish law prohibiting direct advertising to children under the age of 16.

To round off the seminar a lawyer from the Swedish Ministry of Agriculture talked about the nature of legislation on marketing aimed at children in Sweden and how it can and will be affected by EU legislation.

#### Summary of conclusions

To sum up, if we are to protect our children against marketing of unhealthy food, European collaboration is very important. National laws are by no means capable of protecting their inhabitants' children as comprehensively as EU laws are. This project is a fantastic start in terms of mobilising EU politicians to vote in parliament to the advantage of children's health. In Sweden and some other countries it has for some time gone without saying that children should be protected against advertising, but thanks to the

Children and Obesity project these thoughts have been developed simultaneously in 20 countries. Let's hope this will be noticeable in future EU and national policy development.

"Unhealthy foods, often with fun packaging, are placed at child's - eye level"



## News from the UK

by Jane Landon

# Food marketing in the UK

Food marketing to children is at an all time high on the UK policy agenda, where child obesity rates continue to escalate and concerns about poor dietary habits among young people make headline news. The National Heart Forum (NHF) launched the publication of the EHN report to UK media to follow the debate hosted in Brussels on 27 April 2005.

### Marketing of unhealthy food is intended to increase consumption - and it's working

Commenting on the report, Paul Lincoln, chief executive of the NHF said: "We're now seeing the consequences of what

the food and marketing industries already know but refuse to disclose - namely that they invest heavily in marketing food high in fats, sugar and salt to children as a highly effective way to increase consumption, not just gain market share for their brand. This type of food marketing has created an unhealthy food culture throughout Europe."

The NHF news release also coincided with a new report from the Food Commission - a national non-profit organisation campaigning for the right to safe, wholesome food (and a member of the National Heart Forum alliance) - which shows how food manufacturers are shifting into new marketing methods designed to encourage children to advertise food to themselves.

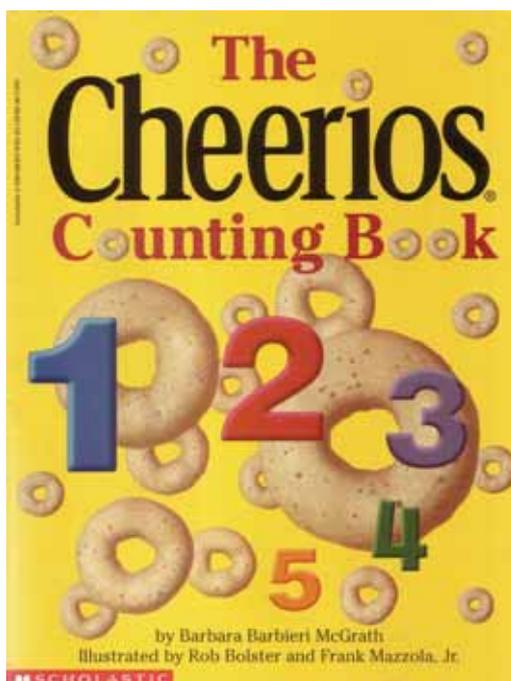
### Marketing is moving beyond television

The report in the Food Magazine provided perfect illustrations of a key issue identified by the EHN project, namely that growing criticism of TV advertising to children is giving rise to an increase in other forms of 'unhealthy' food marketing, including through schools and the Internet and through other broadcast and non-broadcast media. Only by introducing additional measures to address these non-traditional marketing methods will the impact of junk food marketing on children's diets be comprehensively tackled.

Examples given by the Food Commission include a branded Cheerios book that encourages toddlers to place cereal pieces into specially-cut holes on the page. Cheerios cereal, manufactured by Nestlé, is a high sugar, high salt product - it is as salty as ready salted crisps. The confectionery manufacturer Mars uses a similar technique to promote M&M sweets, in basic arithmetic books for young children.

A new promotion for Nestlé Milkybar encourages parents to collect tokens for a 'personalised story book', in which a child's name can be printed into a book involving the Milkybar Kid and his friends. Milkybar products are described as 'a delicious source of milky goodness', but the confectionery is high in sugar and high in saturated fat. "When children read books or play games they are at their most receptive to learning and suggestion. It's an advertiser's dream situation," said Kath Dalmeny, of the Food Commission. "By linking food brands to games and books, companies get children to have fun, but the children are also advertising fatty, salty and sugary products to themselves. The companies hope children will build up positive, even lifelong, associations with the food brands."

Reports in the UK media linked the European perspective with examples from the Food Magazine report and the story was widely covered in both online and print media including BBC News Online,



NetDoctor.com, The Daily Telegraph, The Daily Mail, The Times, The Observer and Public Health News.

**UK white paper favours restrictions on advertising unhealthy foods to children**

In November 2004, the UK government published a white paper on public health in which it committed to restrict further advertising and promotion to children of foods and drinks high in fat, sugar and salt. The government is looking to industry to achieve "change in the nature and balance of food promotion" by 2007. The broadcast regulator Ofcom is currently developing proposals for strengthening codes controlling broadcast advertising. It is expected that revised codes will use the nutrient profile model developed by

the UK Food Standards Agency as the basis for nutritional criteria by which foods and drinks high in fat, sugar or salt can be restricted during children's viewing times. The detailed proposals are due to be published for public consultation in October, and new codes implemented in early 2006.

**A new forum**

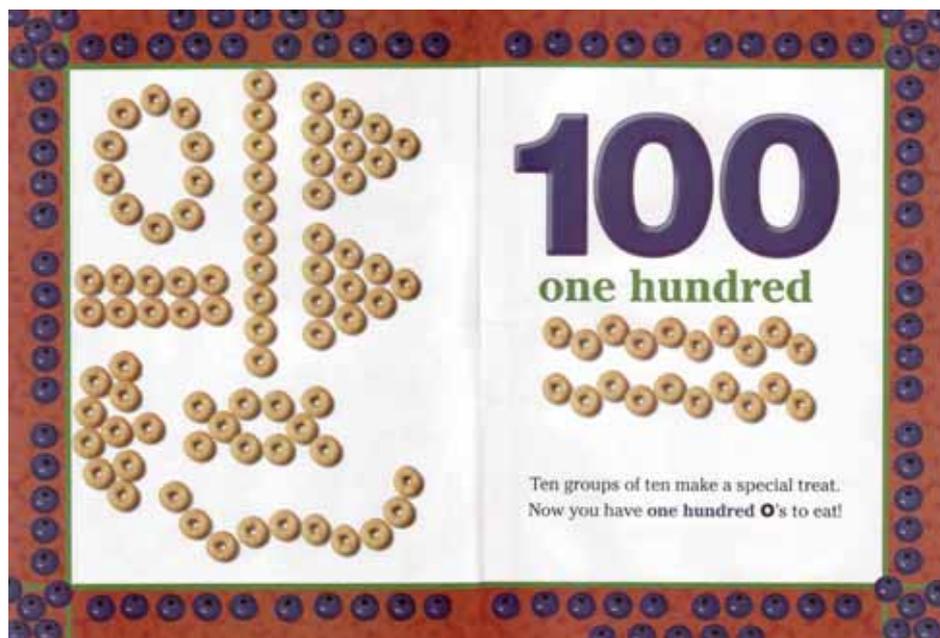
In July, the department of health convened the first meeting of a new Food and Drink Advertising Forum. This body brings together advertisers, regulators, government officials and voluntary organisations representing the interests of consumers, children and public health. The NHF is a member of the Forum, which is chaired by the deputy chief medical

officer, Dr Fiona Adshead. The remit of the new forum is to act as an advisory group to government, to "review, supplement, strengthen and bring together existing provisions on voluntary codes in non-broadcast areas".

The government is also due to commission work to determine success criteria and to set up mechanisms to monitor food promotion across all media. Work will need to progress quickly to gather baseline data on the current "nature and balance of food promotion to children" and to determine meaningful success criteria which are understood by advertisers and consumer/health advocates alike, so that the success or failure of voluntary codes can be properly assessed in 2007.

**Food promotion a priority for UK presidency of the EU**

In October, food promotion to children will be one of the key themes of a major summit meeting on health inequalities hosted by the UK government under the EU presidency. It is anticipated that the outputs from this meeting of government officials from all 25 EU Member States will feed into a number of important policy processes: the EU green paper on nutrition, the EU Platform on Diet, Physical Activity and Health, and a public debate on obesity and nutrition at the EU Health Council meeting in December. As further input to the October summit, the NHF has been asked by the department of health to undertake research to complement the EHN research in those EU countries not participating in the Children and Obesity project: Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland and Slovakia.



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**The European Heart Network plays a leading role in the prevention and reduction of cardiovascular disease through advocacy, networking and education so that it is no longer a major cause of premature death and disability throughout Europe.**

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