HEALTHY WEIGHT AMONG CHILDREN

A UNICEF PRIORITY FOR 2021-2025
THE ISSUE

Child overweight and obesity rates have grown rapidly in urban and rural areas of China. The 2015 Global Burden of Disease report estimates that 15 million children aged 2-19 years old are overweight or obese in China. Based on a national report on nutrition and noncommunicable diseases in 2020, the prevalence of overweight (including obesity) is 10 per cent for children under 6, and 19 per cent for children aged 6-17. Without action, the threat of childhood obesity could have severe short-term and long-term consequences, leading to chronic illness, disability and mortality.

A major cause of this problem is an increase in the consumption of foods and beverages that far exceed a child’s daily requirements of sugar, fat and calories over a prolonged period. Diets have changed rapidly and there is a lack of commensurate regulation of the production, labeling and marketing of unhealthy and ultra-processed foods – especially to children.

A more regulated food environment would make it easier for parents, caregivers and adolescents to make informed, healthy choices about their diet. If this could be combined with higher nutrition literacy, the risks of unhealthy food choices would decrease further. UNICEF is working with government partners to create an environment that promotes nutritious, affordable and sustainable diets as part of healthy lifestyles for children.

UNICEF’S KEY MESSAGES

Rates of overweight and obesity among children have been growing rapidly, and the risk can arise in early childhood when eating behaviours and patterns are set.

Overweight and obesity in children link directly to long-term chronic health conditions that have extensive healthcare costs, such as diabetes, hypertension and metabolic syndrome.

Beyond health impacts, overweight and obesity are detrimental to children’s long-term development, confidence and happiness.

A healthy lifestyle is built on a healthy diet, exercise and sleep. Each is essential.

To alter trends in rising overweight and obesity among children, there is a need to create healthy food environments for children and their parents so that it is easier for them to make healthy choices.

Creating a healthy environment requires wide-ranging regulatory and policy interventions. Two priority areas are:

- Revising the Regulation on Supervision and Management of Food Labeling to improve the clarity of food labels
- Updating the Advertising Law to add articles on restricting the advertisement of unhealthy food and beverages to children.

UNICEF is working with adolescents to empower them to:

- Make healthy choices more appealing to their peers
- Increase awareness of advertising and marketing that may encourage adolescents and young people to consume unhealthy food and drinks.


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