Obesity and Overweight: Population trends & consequences

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Key facts

**Preschool children (< 5 years)**
Total population = 678 million, of whom

40 million (or 5.9%) are overweight

**School-age children (5–9 years)**
Total population = 638 million, of whom

131 million (or 20.6%) are overweight

**Adolescents (10–19 years)**
Total population = 1.2 billion, of whom

207 million (or 17.3%) are overweight

**Adults (18+ years)**
Total population = 5.1 billion, of whom

2 billion (or 38.9%) are overweight

Key facts

In two sub-regions, at least one in every ten children under five is overweight

Percentage of overweight children under 5, by United Nations sub-region, 2018

Contributing Factors

- Rising incomes in LMIC
  - greater demand for nutrient-rich foods
  - With a parallel – and more rapid – increase in consumption of processed food & beverages

- Greater affordability, marketing and availability of high processed, energy-dense, low-nutrient foods
Contribution Factors

Figure 4
Annual retail sales per capita of ultra-processed food and drink products in 13 Latin American countries, 2000–2013

Ultra-processed products here include carbonated soft drinks, sweet and savory snacks, breakfast cereals, confectionery (candy), ice cream, biscuits (cookies), fruit and vegetable juices, sports and energy drinks, ready-to-drink tea or coffee, spreads, sauces, and ready-meals. Quantity in liters is converted into kilograms. Sales data are from the Euromonitor Passport Database (2014) (38).
Factors contributing to obesity and overweight: Inadequate infant and child feeding, insufficient intake of calories, protein, vitamins and minerals, inexpensive, high-calorie, low-nutrition foods, metabolic adaptations to food deprivation, anxiety, stress, depression, disordered patterns of eating.

Pathways from inadequate food access to multiple forms of malnutrition:
- Undernutrition pathway: Food insecurity, uncertain access to food at the household or individual level, food consumption (quantity, quality, continuity), inadequate infant and child feeding, anxiety, stress, depression, disordered patterns of eating.
- Obesogenic pathway: Multiple forms of malnutrition (child stunting and wasting, micronutrient deficiencies, overweight and obesity).
Health impact of obesity and overweight

- ~8% of global deaths globally attributable to overweight/obesity (2017)

- Unhealthy diets are now responsible for more adult deaths and disability worldwide than tobacco use
Health impact

- Obese women who become pregnant have elevated risks to their own health, worse pregnancy outcomes, and offspring have higher risks of adult obesity.

- Breastfeeding reduces risk of overweight/obesity, breast & ovarian cancers, type 2 diabetes, hypertension – only 2 in 5 infants exclusively BF for 6 months.
What works?

- WHO “best buys” for cost-effective interventions to improve unhealthy diets:
  - behaviour change communication and front-of-pack labelling;
  - eliminate industrial trans-fats;
  - tax on sugar-sweetened beverages;
  - reduce salt intake through reformulation;
  - provide lower salt options in public institutions
What works?

- Taxation on sugar-sweetened beverages – enacted in 73 countries – emerging evidence

- In developed countries, vouchers for fruit and vegetable purchases have increased consumption

- Food-based dietary guidelines, in 91 of 193 UM Member States
COVID-19 and Obesity

- Malnourished individuals (undernutrition or obesity) more likely to have severe COVID-19 symptoms, requiring hospitalization
- Obesity is linked to co-morbidities, but newest data suggests obesity has an independent effect -
- In March, obesity was the most prevalent condition among 180 patients age 18-49 hospitalized for COVID-19 in USA
- Obesity appears to be a risk factor among young people with no co-morbid conditions