

STRATEGIES REGARDING THE HEALTHY DIET AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN SOME OF THE EUROPEAN COUNTRIES (II)

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Abstract: The alarming growth of the obesity and overweight in children and youth in the European countries determined the affected states to elaborate strategies for promoting healthy nourishment and physical exercise. Choosing the populational groups is justified by a series of arguments. There are presented only a few of these efforts made in Great Britain, Slovenia and Netherlands.

Cuvinte cheie: obezitate, Uniunea Europeană, stare de sănătate, tineri

Rezumat: Creșterea alarmantă a obezității și supraponderalității la copii și tineri în țările europene a determinat statele afectate spre elaborarea unor strategii de promovare a unei alimentații sănătoase și activității fizice. Alegerea acestor grupuri populaționale este justificată de o serie de argumente. Sunt prezentate doar câteva dintre aceste eforturi desfășurate în Marea Britanie, Slovenia și Olanda

The first part of the article aimed at the strategies and actions in the field of healthy food and physical activity in some of the European Union countries, such as Croatia, France, Germany and Italy. This article will present some of the strategies implemented by Great Britain, Slovenia and the Netherlands, taking into account that these countries have registered alarming rates of overweight and obesity among children, United Kingdom being in the top of the EU countries facing this problem.

As regards the health policy of Great Britain, regarding the fight against obesity among the young people, we will refer to Scotland and Wales, who have concentrated their efforts in building partnerships between health and education sectors to promote health in the educational institutions. Thus, a good example is the "Hungry for Success" programme developed in Scotland. This programme is part of the food national action plan in Scotland, which highlighted a number of issues concerning the eating habits among students, particularly the absence of nutritional standards, in terms of food provided to pupils during the school hours.

In this regard, both the Ministry of Health in Scotland, and the Ministry of Education have joined efforts in creating multi-sectorial partnerships, aimed at involving schools, families, community, with a view to facilitate the access to adequate and safe food, attractively presented, but also at understanding the role of a healthy diet and a healthy lifestyle.

Recent data of the World Health Organization (WHO) EURO Europe Regional Office, shows that Scotland has made progress in terms of strategies and policies to improve young people's health, with focus on establishing the highest possible standards of nutritional quality of food.

Healthy eating, physical activity, sedentary behaviour and obesity among young people are considered priority areas for the authorities in **Wales**.

Recorded data shows that in this country, almost half of school-age children do not eat fruit every day and not take

breakfast regularly. Given that childhood eating habits tend to manifest later, it was necessary to initiate a series of actions to change their unhealthy behaviours. Thus, the most important programme held in the country is the *Food and Fitness Plan for Children and Young People*, which brings together ministries, such as the Ministry of Health and Social Services, the Ministry of Culture and Sports, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Economy, Development and Transportation. This plan of action focuses in particular on healthy eating habits and physical activity in schools.

The most important actions in this regard are:

- Introduction of free breakfast for children in primary school;
- Encouraging the marketing of healthy food in a pilot programme in three secondary schools;
- Water coolers, highlighting the benefits of drinking water under the sign of "Think water";
- Encouraging the consumption of fruit by placing fruit shops inside schools;
- Free swimming courses during the holidays;
- Sports programmes encouraging class and teachers' participation;
- Physical education and sport programmes involving a number of schools, to identify practices to raise standards.

Currently, it is envisaged the creation of new partnerships for young people to strengthen the national policies regarding the access to healthy eating habits and physical activity.

Slovenia is another European Union country where the number of children and adolescents with a body mass index above the normal limit is increasing.

The school network to promote school health (SNHPS) created through the partnership between the Ministry of Health and that of Education and Sport aims at disseminating good practices and expertise regarding health promotion. Under this system, the national programme on nutrition in schools occupies a special place – programme which aimed at the

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participation of kindergartens and primary schools. This programme is legislatively supported by the 1996 Act which requires all schools to offer students at least one meal a day.

Priority areas of health promotion in Slovenia are:

- Reducing the risk of chronic diseases due to unhealthy eating;
- Promoting a healthy diet;
- Promoting physical activity;
- Promoting health education among young people.

In the **Netherlands**, the problem of obesity seems to have been stabilized among adults; on average 52% of men and 41% of women are overweight. Approximately 11% of people over 20 years are considered overweight. But obesity is increasing among children: 15% of boys and 18% of girls are overweight and one in seven babies is overweight, compared to 1 of 10, as it was 10 years ago.

The Dutch National Strategy, 2004-2007 *Living longer in good health*, aims at stopping and reversing the increasing number of obese people, both adult and youth.

In order to tackle obesity, the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport has developed the Convention on overweight and obesity. The Convention (signed in January 2005) is an important pillar of the Ministry of Health policy to address overweight. Quantitative goals include stopping the increase of the number of overweight adults and reducing the number of overweight children by 2010. The Convention provides a platform for the implementation of tools to fight obesity

One of the main national programmes is called *SchoolGruiten*, which is the acronym for "school, fruit and vegetables". It aims at changing the food behaviour of children aged 4 to 12 years.

Under this programme, children become familiar with various fruits and vegetables in a fun and playful way and are encouraged to develop their sense of taste. Also, students were explained the importance of healthy eating, both at this particular age, and later, when they become adults.

Teachers along with their students eat fruit and vegetables two days a week in the classroom. This behavioural component - to eat together - stimulates children to try new things and to distinguish between several dishes. These two days per week, when they eat fruits and vegetables, become an integral part of their everyday life.

SchoolGruiten has already proven to be effective. A large study involving approximately 300 primary schools with a total of approximately 75,000 children and 7,000 teachers involved in seven different cities, turns out that indeed the children at the Gruitschools eat more vegetables, from 1.1 portions a day to 1.6 portions a day. Teachers criticize the project as very positive and children enjoy eating together in the classroom. By providing them with the possibility of eating together, they dare to try new fruits and vegetables faster as before.

Health strategies adopted by most European countries in the field of nutrition and physical activity help reduce the number of obese and overweight children and adolescents and therefore, improve the health of these population groups.

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Source: NSW Health, The Health of Children and Young People in NSW - Report of the Chief Health Officer 2014. Minister's message. The NSW Government is committed to supporting the development of children, providing care for their mothers during pregnancy and health services that are needed as they grow to maturity. Although some measures had been adopted to improve delivery of paediatric services, when I became Health Minister in 2011, I was convinced more could be done to better coordinate different levels of care across the state. This plan provides the framework upon which services will grow in the future. STRATEGY MAP. Vision Children, young people and families in NSW are HEALTHY. Strategic Directions Objectives. What is the Healthy Eating Index? Early Childhood Policy Focus: Healthy Eating and Physical Activity. Young children often respond to modeling from those around them and behavioral prompts (e.g. telling a child that "drinking milk will make you strong").³⁷ Since many children's meals are prepared by others, some effective strategies include improving school breakfast and lunch menus, to incorporate more fresh fruit and vegetables, as well as educating families about ways to incorporate healthier eating into family routines.³⁸ Figure 2. Percent of Overweight Children Ages 2-19 by Age, Selected Years 1976-2008. Children who are both physically active and growing need to refuel periodically throughout the day. Parents and other caretakers have the critical role in helping children make nutritious snack choices. Frequent snacking may result in loss of appetite during the main meal. Focus on reducing obesity and improving diet and physical activity is therefore a priority in many countries. Obesity is a nutritional disorder and is a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease in adulthood. Obesity is also implicated in the development of insulin resistance limiting the body's ability to absorb glucose. Studies indicate that children have too much fat in their diets. Bellisle F. Effects of diet on behaviour and cognition in children. British Journal of Nutrition 2004;suppl. 2:S227-S232.