



Healthy weight in childhood: A winning goal for life



World Health
Organization
Western Pacific Region

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Illustrations by Clarissa Ines

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OVERCOMING OBSTACLES AND MAKING AN EMPOWERED CHOICE



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Overcoming obstacles to a healthy weight in childhood



Children who are overweight or obese are at a higher risk of developing serious health problems, including type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma or other respiratory problems, sleep disorders and liver disease. As adults, they are at greater risk for obesity and premature death or disability, contributing to the epidemic of noncommunicable diseases. Overweight and obesity also exert a psychological toll on children, increasing the risk of low self-esteem, depression and social isolation.

From a public health, economic and moral perspective, governments must act on this issue. Tackling childhood obesity improves the health and well-being of children. They grow to become healthier adults, leading longer and more productive lives, benefiting the economy and curbing the toll of noncommunicable diseases.

Unfortunately, there are many obstacles to having a healthy weight in childhood and maintaining a healthy weight throughout adulthood. Most of the obstacles can be overcome with political will, commitment and legal instruments. For example, Member States can ensure that healthy food options are accessible; that consumers can easily figure out which foods are healthier by looking at the labels; that marketing of foods, non-alcoholic beverages and breast-milk substitutes does not mislead the consumer; and that children have plenty of opportunities to be active in safe environments.

This booklet highlights seven obstacles to a healthy weight. It suggests actions for policy-makers to address those obstacles and create an enabling environment that allows children and caregivers to make empowered dietary choices.



OBSTACLE 1

Environment, practices and policies that discourage optimal breastfeeding

OVERCOMING THE OBSTACLE

Member States can promote, protect and support breastfeeding by encouraging the First Embrace (skin-to-skin contact shortly after birth), adopting the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and providing breastfeeding-friendly maternity services and work environments.

Optimal breastfeeding practices, as recommended by WHO, include exclusive breastfeeding for six months and continued breastfeeding up to two years and beyond.



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