

# A Statement on Obesity from the World Heart Federation

February 2004

The World Heart Federation encourages public actions designed to stop and reverse the recent increase in the prevalence of obesity in most countries of the world. The number of obese adults globally has reached over 300 million. In developing countries 115 million persons suffer from obesity-related health problems, which include heart disease, hypertension, non-insulin dependent diabetes and high levels of cholesterol. Approximately 22 million children under five years are obese across the world and many more are overweight. Underweight/overweight and general malnourishment coexist in several parts of the world.


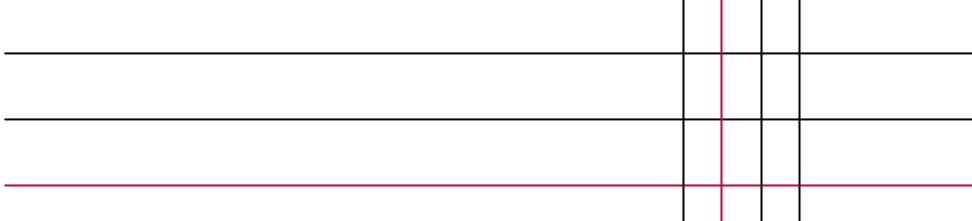
Being aware of this information and the consequent substantial impact on the burden of cardiovascular disease, the World Heart Federation is taking action to control and prevent this epidemic of obesity, in addition to maintaining its focus on the harmful effects of tobacco.

Improving diet and increasing physical activity of individuals and populations are not achievable solely by promoting individual awareness and individual knowledge. Collective action, including the development of international strategies, together with supportive government policies, are essential in order to advance public health and minimise the hazards associated with a global epidemic of obesity. Proactive involvement with food, sport and other industries is also critical.

## **Established Actions**

Today, the World Heart Federation is active in the following fields of nutrition and physical activity:

- International collaboration has been actively developed with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the International Union Against Cancer (UICC) and the International Obesity Task Force (IOTF).
- The World Heart Federation is one of the international NGOs consulted for the World Health Organization's (WHO) Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health.
- WHF is actively involved, together with UICC, in a World Health Organization conference on "Health Promoting Schools".


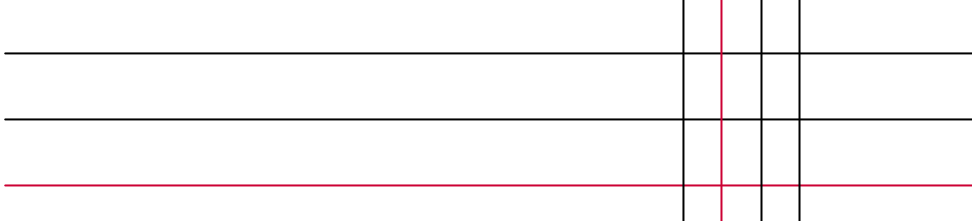
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- The theme for 2004's World Heart Day is "Children, Adolescents and Heart Disease", with a focus on children and obesity. The objective of this global health promotion programme is to increase awareness in the population throughout the year through media activity and to implement many street activities on the day itself. The theme for 2005's World Heart Day is "Obesity".
  - Through its national members, the World Heart Federation supports the development of food labelling programmes, for example, an approval symbol of healthy products, the "Pick the Tick" programme in Australia and New Zealand, the "Heart Mark" programme in South African, explanations for consumers in supermarkets, and the "Visitas a supermercados" programme in Portugal.
  - Through its national members, the World Heart Federation develops physical activity programmes, including the "Jump Rope for Heart" programme that teaches skipping skills in schools in many countries.


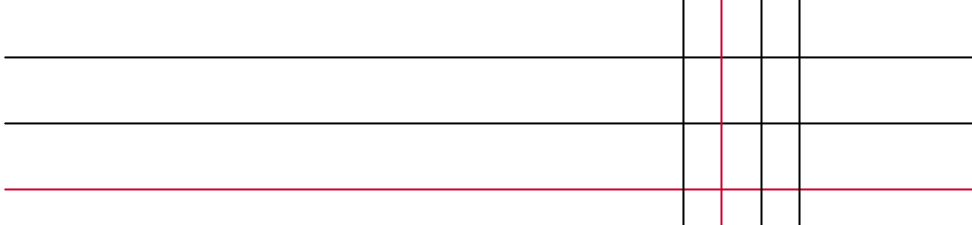
The knowledge gained from these national programmes is shared with our 175 member Societies of Cardiology and Heart Foundations from over 100 countries.

### **Current and Planned Actions**

The World Heart Federation is intensifying its focus on obesity by developing and actively supporting the following nine major initiatives:

1. Supporting the World Health Organization's strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health through its adoption at the World Health Assembly in May 2004 and its subsequent implementation.
2. Calling for an international alliance with other global NGOs (IOTF, UICC, International Diabetes Federation, International Council of Nurses, etc.) against an environment likely to favour the development of obesity and to develop a stronger advocacy voice so that there is greater professional, public and political support for action. The World Heart Federation proposes a specific internet network to strengthen international action against obesity and to share positive experiences.

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3. Increasing awareness of the obesity epidemic and the benefits of healthy diets and physical activity among the population and policy-makers through active support of the media.
  4. Making people aware that childhood obesity is a crucial risk factor for later ill health. Healthy nutrition for children is part of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child. Article 17 encourages the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being. Obesity is not just a matter of individual responsibility; children should be protected from an environment leading to obesity.
  5. Protecting children:
    - Replace advertisements for candy, snacks, fast foods and soft drinks on television aimed at children and shown at times and on programmes commonly watched by children with advertisements promoting healthy lifestyles.
    - Make fruits and vegetables readily available.
    - Replace unhealthy foods in vending machines by healthy foods.
    - Place healthy options near the cash register in supermarkets.
    - Develop easy to understand information content and labelling on packaging and in restaurants.
    - Protect children in schools by minimising the sale of soft drinks, candy bars and food high in calories, fat or sugar.
    - Encourage healthy school meals.
    - Increase physical activity in schools by providing play grounds and sports facilities.
  6. Stressing among families and teachers the importance of traditional food and enhancing the value of healthy cooking skills.
  7. Creating public/private partnerships so as to improve content labelling on all foods, to decrease portion size, to reduce salt and sugar levels, to encourage fat substitution and to implement education programmes on nutrition to help people achieve energy balance.
  8. Promoting increased physical activity by any sustainable form of exercise.
  9. Advocating to governments through World Heart Federation members:

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- To provide incentives to communities to develop areas for physical activity such as bicycle paths, jogging trails, and sports areas (swimming pools, tennis courts, ball fields, etc.).
  - To develop zoning laws to encourage footpaths.
  - To adopt price policies to make healthy foods (fruits and vegetables) more affordable to all and, where relevant, increase the price of energy dense foods.
  - To make healthy choices easy choices (availability of reduced fat milk, salad options, vegetable based dishes, etc.).
  - To change school-based curricula to increase physical activity.
  - To use legislation when voluntary action is insufficient.

The Mission Statement of the World Heart Federation is:

*The World Heart Federation helps people achieve a longer and better life, through prevention and control of heart disease and stroke, with a focus on low and middle-income countries.*

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