

spectra

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Nutrition and Physical Activity

2 Stopping obesity before it's too late

People in Switzerland are getting fatter and fatter. 2.2 million people in our country are too heavy or obese, and the number is growing by about 50,000 every year. It is estimated that obesity and the medical conditions associated with it cost society between CHF 2.5 and 3 billion every year. Excess weight and obesity are the major public health challenge of the 21st century. The federal government is facing the challenge head on, joining forces with a large number of partners to develop a national programme for nutrition, physical activity and health.

4 Equality of health opportunities for migrants

How healthy are the 1.5 million or so people who have migrated to our country? The results of the Health Monitoring of the Swiss Migrant Population study enable accurate conclusions to be drawn for the first time. This monitoring programme is a central element of the federal «Migration and Health 2002–2007» strategy, the stated aim of which is to create equal health opportunities for all.

4 Adolescents and binge drinking: Handle with care!

Binge drinking is becoming increasingly popular with young people. Uncontrolled consumption of alcohol affects society as a whole: alcohol increases the individual's willingness to use violence, is responsible for a large number of accidents, and ultimately impairs the quality of life of the entire population. The new, visually striking «Handle with care!» campaign specifically points out the negative effects of problematic alcohol consumption to young people.



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Federal Department of Home Affairs FDHA
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Working together to beat obesity and lack of exercise

National Nutrition and Physical Activity Programme. Excess weight and obesity are the major public health challenge of the 21st century. The federal government is facing the challenge head on, joining forces with a large number of partners to develop a national programme for nutrition, physical activity and health.

The figures speak volumes: 2.2 million people in Switzerland are overweight or obese, and the number is increasing by around 50,000 every year. The cost to society of obesity and the resulting health problems is estimated at about CHF 2.7 billion annually (in the year 2001). These quantifiable aspects are compounded by factors such as impaired quality of life, the psychological burden, and reduced life expectancy. One particularly worrying aspect is the prevalence of obesity among children (one in five is too heavy) and socially disadvantaged groups within the population.

The Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) has assigned priority status to the task of developing a «National Programme for Nutrition, Physical Activity and Health». The primary goal of this programme is to promote collaboration both within Switzerland and at international level and to establish partnerships between all the players. The planned measures are intended to alter

the framework within which the problem exists and to promote individual responsibility, encouraging the Swiss population to adopt a healthier lifestyle incorporating a balanced diet and more exercise and bringing the increase in obesity, excess weight in general and eating disorders to a halt.

A public health challenge

Until the mid-19th century, everyday life involved a high level of physical exertion: hunting, working the fields and manual labour dominated. For a long time, physical activity was simply a fact of life. Technical progress brought us cars, television, video games and the Internet. Most people nowadays need to exert far less physical effort in their everyday activities and at the workplace. According to the WHO's World Health Report, a sedentary job is one of the major risk factors, coupled with an unbalanced diet and smoking, that has led to the current incidence and severity of chronic diseases worldwide. In 2000, a lack of physical activity caused 1.9 million deaths worldwide and was responsible for about 15 to 20% of all heart disease, cases of diabetes and certain types of cancer. Recent research has shown that regular physical activity and a balanced diet protect against most of these diseases.

The WHO states that excess weight and obesity have already reached epidemic proportions. In 2004, the renowned medical journal *The Lancet* described the increase in obesity as a «catastrophic failure» of the public health services. Today there are over 300 million obese people in the world, and this figure could double in the next 20 years.

A national programme

In May 2004, the Federal Council acknowledged the WHO's «Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health», published with the intention of halting the massive increase in the number of overweight and obese people. The mandate issued to the FOPH by the Federal Council foresees the adaptation of the WHO strategy to the situation in Switzerland.

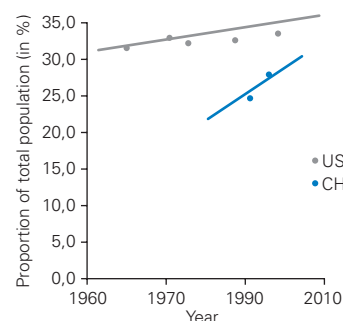
The FOPH has set up a project group within its National Prevention Programmes Department which has the task of implementing this programme. Excess weight, obesity and eating disorders are problems that often require an interdisciplinary and multisectoral approach. With this in mind, the project was conceived on the basis of collaboration and partnership. It is structured around an internal steering committee within the FOPH and an external political steering group. At the operational level, two teams are responsible for editorial work and organisation. An external group of experts which brings together representatives of the tertiary education institutions, cantonal medical officers, the Federal Office for Sport and the Health Promotion Switzerland group



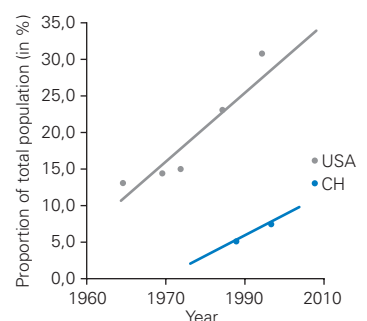
People need to start learning about healthy nutrition and exercise at an early age.

Trends in excess weight and obesity

Excess weight (BMI 25 – 29.9)



Obesity (BMI = 30 and over)



USA: data from NHANES studies; CH: data from Swiss Health Survey 1992, 1997, 2002.

will ensure that the programme meets high scientific standards.

The external nutrition platform maintained by the FOPH will enable the content and development of the National Programme for Nutrition, Physical Activity and Health to be communicated directly to a large number of experts.

The provisional content of the programme was defined during a series of preparatory meetings, and the programme itself was presented to the involved players at three workshops held in the late summer of 2006. The workshops were attended by 92 representatives from 75 organisations. The main objective of these strategic workshops was to bring together players who do not necessarily speak the same language around the same table; the idea was also to strengthen the players' commitment to collaborating and to integrate everyone into the development and implementation of the National Programme for Nutrition, Physical Activity and Health.

Strategic orientation

In addition to projects supported by the FOPH – such as *Suisse Balance*, *5 A Day* and a foundation to promote breastfeeding – there are a lot of other activities in Switzerland organised by the cantons, communes, private institutions, NGOs and other players which focus on pro-

moting a healthy lifestyle. The National Programme for Nutrition, Physical Exercise and Health does not seek to replace these activities; its goal is to promote collaboration and partnership. What is needed here is national coordination to ensure better allocation of resources and to avoid duplication. The National Programme is aligned with the WHO's Global Strategy for Diet, Physical Activity and Health and incorporates the message of the European charter on counteracting obesity. The definitive version of the National Programme is scheduled for submission to the Federal Council in the second half of 2007. This milestone will conclude the first phase of the project, which is dedicated to developing the content of the programme. Once the Federal Council has reached an opinion on the programme, the second phase of the project will revolve around implementing it. The intention is to draw up an action plan which will define responsibilities for all the players and priorities for the implementation of the programme's measures.

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Evaluation of the 5th Swiss Nutrition Report 2005

The Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) published the 5th Swiss Nutrition Report in December 2005 in two versions: a long version (1,070 pages), which provides details of the nutritional status and dietary habits of the Swiss population, and a shorter version for the general public which focuses on the nutritional status of children and young people (see also spectra No. 54, January 2006).

The objective of the evaluation was to obtain a decision-making basis on which to plan and prepare the next Nutrition Report so that the form and content can be improved in the next edition (also the frequency with which it appears and the target audience).

The results of the evaluation, carried out by econcept AG in Zurich, can be summarised as follows: Nutrition Report yes, but take a different approach. The concept (form and content) and the target groups for the different versions need to be clarified and adapted. The results suggest that an Internet platform would be a good approach for the full version, and this could perhaps replace the printed reports.

www.health-evaluation.admin.ch
> Reports > Nutrition

Switzerland supports WHO charter on counteracting obesity

Ministerial Conference in Istanbul. A charter on counteracting obesity was adopted at the WHO European Ministerial Conference on nutrition and physical activity for health, which took place in mid-November 2006 in Istanbul. Switzerland supports the approaches proposed in the charter and has indicated its willingness to take the necessary measures.

Excess weight and obesity are more than a personal subject that affects the individual. They affect all areas of politics, the economy and society at large. Excess weight and obesity have a wide variety of effects, and the causes and responsibilities are just as varied.

Good coordination is important

The participants at the Ministerial Conference were in agreement that the actions taken to counteract obesity need to be closely coordinated, supported by all stakeholders, and steered at the highest level. Against this background, Thomas Zeltner, Director of the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) and head of the

Swiss delegation, greatly welcomed the WHO's initiative in promoting this charter. It is an important guide to producing the programme which the FOPH in Switzerland is currently developing along the lines of the World Health Organization's «Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health». The composition of the Swiss delegation also showed that the dialogue between the stakeholders is well advanced in our country, and that the need for a joint strategy on «Nutrition, physical activity and health» has been recognised: representatives of the government offices FOPH and BASPO were joined at the Ministerial Conference in Istanbul by officials from the cantonal education and health authorities and the Health Promotion Switzerland group.

A basis for the Swiss package of measures

The European charter identifies better coordination of economic, social and cultural objectives with goals for health as an important element in countering obesity, the aim being to make it easier for the individual to reach decisions that

benefit his or her health. This means that the problem of obesity needs to be given greater consideration in political decisions, and partnerships need to be established between all the players, which include the state, society at large, the private sector, professional organisations, the media and international organisations, with the goal of promoting a healthier diet and more physical activity.

The charter is a further important reference document for the development of the Swiss «Nutrition and physical activity» package of measures which will be submitted to the Federal Council in 2007.

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What voluntary measures are trade and industry taking?

Obesity is a health risk. The Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) convened the 3rd Round Table discussion with industry, wholesalers, consumer organisations and other stakeholders to consider what voluntary measures might be implemented successfully by trade and industry.

Experts are unanimous that the problem of obesity needs to be tackled on various levels. It is clear that consumers need to modify their behaviour, but it is also crucial to modify the environment within which the problem of obesity exists. This includes aspects such as the type of food products available, portion sizes, food labelling, education about nutrition, food advertising and food prices.

The 3rd Round Table with industry, wholesalers, consumer organisations and other stakeholders was held in March 2006 and focused on the question of whether, and with what voluntary measures, it might be possible to achieve a change for the better. The Federation of Swiss Food Industries (FIAL) presented seven action levels on which it and its members want to introduce voluntary measures in the future. The intention is for FIAL members to make changes in specific areas – product declarations, optimised product recipes, smaller portion sizes, optimised selections in vending machines, no advertising to children under 6, increasing

popular awareness, and promoting health in the workplace – and publicise these changes in the Internet. These action levels were welcomed, but the question of whether voluntary measures are a suitable approach was considered critically, as was the problem of defining and monitoring the efficacy of possible self-regulation efforts.

Attention also focused on the nutrition declaration on food products and its design as an additional voluntary measure. Waedenswil University of Applied Sciences presented new and innovative models for improving the comprehensibility of nutrition information for consumers. The EU is also discussing future requirements that declarations and nutrition labels will have to meet, and in this context Switzerland is aiming for a coordinated approach. Labels that consumers find easier to understand will not solve the problem of obesity on their own. However, they are an important element and will enable consumers to contribute more effectively to taking responsibility for their diet. The FOPH is requesting the food industry to make wider use of voluntary nutrition declarations on its products.

Sharing responsibility

The FOPH has been convening Round Tables with industry, trade, consumer organisations and other stakeholders annually since 2004; the objective is to discuss measures to prevent obesity. It is crucial for these players to work to-

gether if the problem of obesity is to be countered effectively. The first two Round Tables considered which players might take responsibility for containing the obesity epidemic and which measures might be incorporated into Swiss law in an attempt to improve the country's diet.

The public health authorities will not be able to overcome the problem of obesity on their own; it is crucial for prevention projects and legal requirements to be flanked by measures adopted voluntarily by industry and the food trade. All players must accept a share of the responsibility for promoting healthy weight.

The 3rd Round Table showed that the stakeholders are aware of their responsibility. The voluntary measures that have been put forward are interesting approaches to improving the situation sustainably. However, they are only likely to be effective if they are implemented rapidly and systematically.

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At first hand

The Swiss Health Survey shows clearly that the number of people in our country who are overweight or obese has grown by 23% in the last ten years. One third of the population pays no attention to nutrition, and one third gets no physical exercise. Switzerland is responding to this development! A number of players are committed to preventing people from becoming overweight. The recommendations that have been developed form an important foundation for these efforts: children need to get at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day, adults a minimum of 30 minutes.

The food pyramid demonstrates how a balanced diet should look.

The subject is also of central importance for the Federal Office of Public Health. The implementation of the national programme for diet, physical activity and health will present many challenges. Excess weight has many causes, and the solutions to the problem need to be equally varied. As stated in the WHO's European charter on counteracting obesity, coordinating the numerous players in the fields of diet and physical activity, with their varied backgrounds and interests, will be a major challenge. The international exchange demanded by the WHO is of central importance alongside the national perspective.

The programme revolves around the promotion of voluntary measures and partnerships between the public and private sectors with the aim of achieving win-win solutions. One of the major principles underlying the development of the national programme is the balance between the need to promote individual health skills and the necessity of creating a framework within society for these activities. It must also be ensured that overweight and obese people do not become the targets of even more discrimination, and that when activities are planned they also make provision for groups who are not able to follow the recommendations on diet and physical activity, such as the elderly, people with psychological or physical problems and the socioeconomically disadvantaged.

Switzerland is prepared to meet the challenge of promoting physical activity, a balanced diet and a healthy weight. It can draw on extensive experience with national programmes that have already been carried out in other areas of prevention, on collaboration with numerous players, and on a welcome international exchange with the WHO and the EU.



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«Handle with care!» Joint effort against one too many

Alcohol prevention campaign «Handle with care!» The new, visually striking «Handle with care!» campaign specifically highlights the negative effects of problematic alcohol consumption to young people.

Problematic drinking affects society as a whole: alcohol increases the individual's willingness to use violence, is responsible for a large number of accidents, and ultimately impairs the quality of life of the entire population. Every year, alcohol consumption causes 2,100 deaths and around 30,000 lost years of life.

Until the end of 2007 the Federal Office of Public Health will be working, at the Federal Council's request, with other involved government offices and major stakeholders in Switzerland's alcohol policy to develop the National Alcohol Programme 2007–2011.

A direct approach to young people

In the meantime, and despite the cuts in funding, it is important to continue raising public awareness of the problems associated with alcohol consumption,



which is a particularly worrying issue among adolescents. This is why the new, visually striking «Handle with care!» campaign specifically highlights the negative effects of alcohol consumption to young people. At the same time, the new campaign capitalises on the widespread familiarity of its predecessor by retaining the «campaign glass» and the slogan. The campaign is being supported by the portals www.tilllate.com and www.lautundspitz.ch, thus making it visible to clubbers.

An important element in alcohol pre-

vention is collaboration with cantons, communes and private institutions. The national campaign is flanked by posters showing the addresses of advisory and walk-in centres, and various promotional materials are available for partners, institutions, schools and other interested parties.

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A new look for spectra

New layout and more pages. The Federal Office of Public Health has been publishing spectra, its newsletter about health promotion and prevention, since 1995. Future issues of spectra will have a new look.

spectra is published six times a year and provides information on a wide range of projects and programmes pursued by the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) in the fields of health promotion and prevention.

Now spectra has been given a new look. This move was prompted by the standardised graphic design that has been introduced throughout the federal administration. The title page features an attractive illustration and the issue's headlines, and is followed by the slimmed-down feature pages. The physical appearance of the new spectra also identifies it as an up-to-date journal with solid content. The re-design has given spectra a new, lighter-coloured paper which shows off pictures and graphics to even greater advantage.

spectra online

spectra is also available online. The current and previous issues can be read on the FOPH website and downloaded as PDF files.

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How healthy is the migrant population in our country?

Health monitoring of the Swiss migrant population. A serious gap in our knowledge has been closed: for the first time, detailed data are available on the state of health of migrants, who make up a significant proportion of the people living in Switzerland.

The Health Monitoring of the Swiss Migrant Population (HMM) study has produced a body of data describing the health situation of migrants, their health behaviours and the use they make of health facilities. This makes it possible for the first time to produce an objective review of the health situation of migrants in Switzerland in comparison with the native population. Some 3,000 telephone interviews were conducted with migrants in the 15 to 74 age group who live permanently in Switzerland and with asylum seekers. Respondents had the choice of being interviewed in their mother tongue or one of Switzerland's official languages. The initial results show that migrants from countries in western Europe are comparable to native Swiss in terms of health and social status. All other migrants score worse on many health and social indicators. For example, they are more likely to perceive their own state of health as only moderately good or poor, feel less well-balanced mentally, and are more likely to consult a doctor than native Swiss. The data show that health status varies considerably within the migrant population interviewed for the study.

Findings vary according to gender, age, residence status and nationality.

Approximately 1.5 million migrants

The Federal Office of Public Health started a «Health monitoring of the migrant population in Switzerland» programme at the end of 2003. This programme is a central element of the federal «Migration and Health 2002–2007» strategy, the stated aim of which is to create equal health opportunities for all. The objective of the federal government in monitoring the migrant population is to create a basis for improving the situation of migrants with respect to the provision of healthcare, health behaviours and prevention. At the end of 2003, when the HMM study was launched, there were 1.47 million non-Swiss nationals (workers and their dependents) and nearly 65,000 asylum seekers living in Switzerland.

The «Monitoring the Health of the Swiss Migrant Population» project has a modular design. Module I includes people from Italy, Germany, Austria and France (i.e. those who speak one of Switzerland's official languages); Module II covers Swiss residents of Portuguese, Turkish and Tamil origin and those from former Yugoslavia; Module III comprises Albanian and Tamil asylum seekers.

Less favourable starting position

With the exception of the group comprising Germans, Austrians and French,

the social situation of the migrant population in terms of level of education, employment and income is less favourable across the board than that of Swiss nationals. Asylum seekers and the Tamil and Albanian groups are in the least favourable situation.

Analysis of the data revealed that health differences are due not only to the respondents' migrant background but also to differences in social situation and integration-related factors.

How migrants use the health system

The way in which migrants use the health facilities available in Switzerland is another important indicator of their state of health. The mean number of visits to a doctor is considerably higher in some migrant groups. In some cases migrants make less use of preventive check-up programmes.

Language problems are a recurring theme in connection with use of the health system. Migrants frequently try to overcome them by asking a relative or spouse to interpret for them. This tends to compromise the confidentiality of the relationship between doctor and patient. For example, having a man to interpret for a female patient can be problematic.

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Credits

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