WHO estimates show that more than approximately 1 billion people worldwide are overweight (BMI $\geq 25$) and more than 300 million are obese (BMI $\geq 30$). Overweight and obesity are increasing globally as a result of dietary change and decreasing physical activity. Rates of overweight and obesity are projected to increase in almost all countries, reaching 1.5 billion people who are overweight by 2015. The risk of coronary heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes grows steadily with increasing body mass, as do the risks of cancers of the breast, colon, prostate and other organs. Chronic overweight also contributes to osteoarthritis—a major cause of disability in later life.

Causal pathway for NCD

Globally, 44% of diabetes, 23% of ischaemic heart disease and between 7% and 41% of certain cancer burdens are attributable to overweight and obesity.

Key areas for action:

Overweight and obese children are likely to stay overweight into adulthood and more likely to develop noncommunicable diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular diseases at a younger age than average. Prevention of childhood obesity should therefore be assigned high priority:

- Promote and support six months of exclusive breastfeeding of newborns;
- Create a healthy school environment;
- Introduce a mass media campaign targeting primarily parents and care-givers, as well as secondary schoolchildren and adolescents;
- Introduce and implement legislation to support healthier composition of foods;
- Develop fiscal policies to encourage consumption of healthier food products and increase access to recreational physical activity, particularly among poor communities;
- Reduce marketing of food and non-alcoholic beverages to children;
- Support pricing strategies with point-of-decision prompts;
- Change physical environment to support active commuting and space for recreational activity.

1 BMI - body mass index
Developing a policy

Childhood obesity is one of the most serious public health challenges of the 21st century. The problem is global and is steadily affecting many low- and middle-income countries, particularly in urban settings. Prevalence has increased at an alarming rate. In 2010, an estimated 43 million children under the age of five years were overweight throughout the world. More than 75% of overweight and obese children live in low- and middle-income countries.

Curbing the childhood obesity epidemic requires sustained political commitment and the collaboration of many public and private stakeholders.

Country case study: 

Healthier Choice Symbol Programme (Singapore)

The Healthier Choice Symbol (HCS) on certain packaged food products indicates that they are healthier options, helping consumers to make informed food choices when grocery shopping. Products carrying the HCS are generally lower in total fat, saturated fat, sodium and sugar. Some are also higher in dietary fibre and calcium compared to similar products within the same food category. Each food category has a separate set of established nutritional criteria. For example, breads displaying the HCS should contain no trans fat, less sodium (≤450 mg/100 g) and more dietary fibre (≥3 g per 100 g) compared to other breads. To date, there are guidelines covering over 70 food categories.

A variant of the HCS for snack foods, known as the Healthier Snack Symbol (HSS) has also recently been introduced. This category includes plain biscuits and cookies, crisps, ice-cream and plain cakes. Products that are eligible for the HSS are individually packed in small portions (according to serving sizes described on the nutrition information panel), and are generally lower in fat, saturated fat, sodium or sugar compared to other products.

Source: www.hpb.gov.sg/foodforhealth/article.aspx?id=2780#