JAPAN

Population1  127 291 000
Infant mortality rate1  3.1 per 1000 live births
Life expectancy at birth1  Males 78.1 years  Females 84.9 years
Fertility rate1  1.36
Annual population growth rate1  0.3 %

NUTRITION OVERVIEW

Major nutritional problems are related to the rapid increase in the number of older people and changing patterns in chronic diseases. Diabetes mellitus and obesity have become national concerns. Mortality due to different types of cancer, related to changing dietary habits and tobacco smoking, has increased in the last decade.

NUTRITIONAL PROBLEMS

Birth weight

In 2000, 9.5% of infants were born with a low birth weight (<2500 g).

Infant feeding

The Infant Physical Growth Survey 2000 showed that the proportion of infants being exclusively breast-fed was 44.8% at one month and 39.4% at three months of age, while the figures in the 1990 survey were 44.1% and 37.5%, respectively. According to the same survey, 97.9% of infants aged six to seven months were receiving complementary foods in addition to breast milk.

Nutritional anaemia

In 2001, 13.1% of women aged 20-29 years, 19.7% (30-39 years) and 27.3% (40-49 years) were found to be anaemic (Hb<12 g/dl).

Obesity

In 2001, among males of 20 years or older, 4.9% had a BMI<18.5 and 28% had a BMI≥25. For women the corresponding figures were 10% and 21.6%.

The WHO Global Database on BMI reports rates of overweight and obesity (%) in 2001 as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year survey began/ended</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age range (years)</th>
<th>Rates of overweight and obesity (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Overweight (BMI≥25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>≥15</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Both sexes</td>
<td></td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES DIRECTED AT NUTRITION

National food policies have been formulated by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries regarding food production, supply and marketing, and by the Department of Food Safety of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare with respect to food safety. The Food Safety Commission was established in the Cabinet Office in 2003 to respond to emerging problems in food safety.

The National Nutrition Policy had proceeded under the Nutrition Improvement Law, enacted in 1952, and will go ahead under the Health Promotion Law, enacted in 2003. Since the economic growth of the 1960s and 1970s, nutritional and health conditions have been changing. In order to answer growing concerns over health and diet, the Ministry of Health and Welfare convened a Study Committee on Nutrition and Diet to develop a framework for National Nutrition Policy in the new era. The report of this committee was published in 1997 and is considered the National Plan of Action on Nutrition.

A new framework for public health policy, HEALTH JAPAN 21, was formulated in 2000. It focuses mainly on prevention of chronic diseases to improve quality of life, especially for older people, and to decrease expanding medical costs. The policy is a 10-year plan with baseline and goal indicators, and has several nutritional and dietary objectives as core components of primary prevention and health promotion.


Breast-feeding policies

There has been a National Breast-feeding Policy since 1975. The Japan Breast-feeding Association, a nongovernmental organization founded on the initiative of Okayama National Hospital, is recognized as an active group in promoting breast-feeding in Japan.

In 2003, 17 hospitals had been designated as baby-friendly.

The International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes has not been adopted, but some provisions are adhered to as part of a voluntary agreement with the baby-food industry.

There are 14 weeks of maternity leave in both the public and private sectors (law enforced in 1995) but this leave is not paid according to International Labour Organization (ILO) standards.

Monitoring and surveillance of nutritional status

The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare monitor health and nutritional status annually. The ministry also conducts Infant Physical Growth Survey to collect data on physical growth, breast-feeding and weaning practices every 10 years. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology is responsible for school health statistics.

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