

TIPPING THE SCALES:

WHY PREVENTING OBESITY MAKES ECONOMIC SENSE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CANCER RESEARCH UK

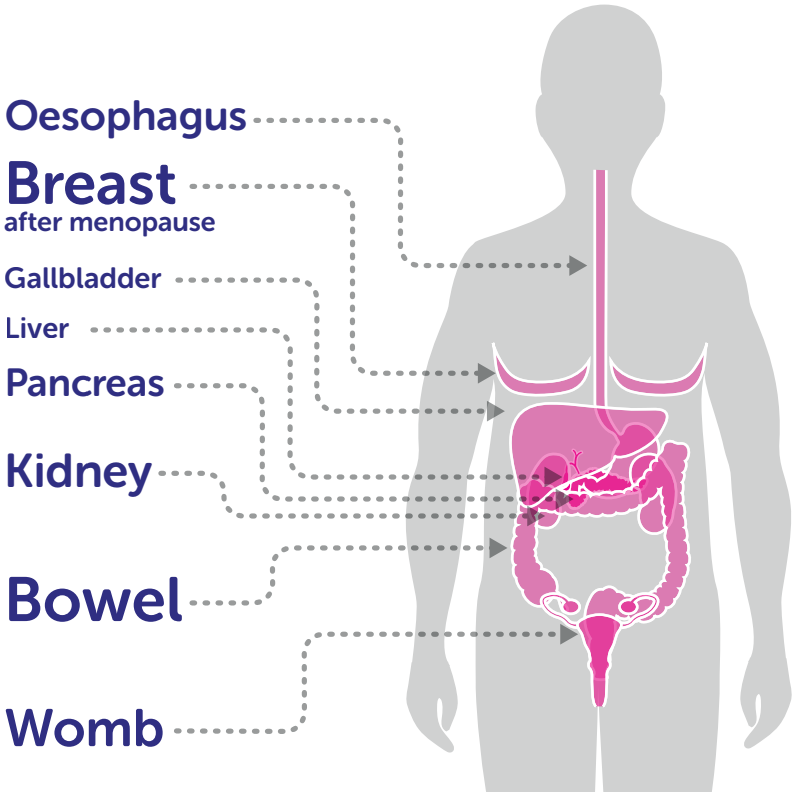
UK HEALTH PREVENTION FIRST FORUM

OBESITY IS A MAJOR CAUSE OF ILLNESS AND DEATH

This places a disease and economic burden on the NHS which can be prevented

10 TYPES OF CANCER

could be caused by being overweight or obese



Being overweight may also cause aggressive prostate and ovarian cancer

This report predicts that if trends of being overweight and obese continue:

3 IN 4 Almost 3 in 4 adults will be overweight or obese by 2035

670,000 Over the next 20 years rising levels of obesity would lead to an additional 670,000 cases of cancer

£2.5bn This level of obesity would lead to an additional £2.5bn in NHS and social care costs in 2035

HOW THE GOVERNMENT CAN TACKLE CHILDREN'S OBESITY

A national strategy to reduce obesity should include:



Introducing a 6am to 9pm watershed ban on TV advertising of foods high in fat, sugar and salt





Examining the case for further taxes on food high in fat, sugar and salt, and increasing the affordability of healthy alternatives



Extending front-of-pack nutritional traffic light labelling to as many food and drink products as possible



A Government framework for businesses to reduce the fat, calorie and sugar content in their foods



Increase funding for cycling and walking



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INTRODUCTION

Being overweight and obese is a major cause of preventable early illness and death in the UK, placing a significant disease and economic burden on the NHS.

This research provides new evidence on the future trends of overweight and obesity over the next 20 years, alongside the benefits to society that reducing excess weight in the UK can have on:

- Avoiding cases of cancer, type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease and stroke
- Avoiding costs to the NHS, composed of primary care, secondary care, urgent and emergency cases, and social care, as well as costs to wider society of losing economic productivity from early illness or death

To generate our findings, we used a computer model developed during the Government's Foresight: Tackling Obesities project in 2007. This involved inputting the latest demographic, disease and health cost data, to produce estimates of avoidable costs and disease incidence associated with obesity.

By taking current and historic data, the model has estimated future obesity and overweight trends. If the current trends continue, rates of overweight and obesity could increase even further. However, making small inroads into reducing obesity levels can create opportunities for the health of the UK population to improve substantially.

THE KEY FINDINGS ARE THAT IF CURRENT TRENDS CONTINUE:

- Almost three in four (72%) of the UK adult population would be predicted to become overweight or obese by 2035
- Almost four in ten (39%) of the UK adult population would be predicted to become obese by 2035
- Rates of overweight and obesity would continue to be higher in men than in women, with 76% of men becoming overweight or obese by 2035 compared to 69% of women
- Overweight and obesity prevalence would be predicted to increase across all income groups, with the poorest in society likely to continue to be the heaviest. Almost half of women (49%) from the lowest income quintile would be predicted to be obese in 2035.

THIS RATE OF INCREASE IN THE PREVALENCE OF OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY[i] IS PREDICTED TO LEAD TO SIGNIFICANT INCREASES IN HEALTH COSTS AND DISEASE PREVALENCE:

- In 2035 alone, around 440,000 new cases of disease would be attributable to overweight and obesity in the UK. This includes around 257,200 new cases of type 2 diabetes.
- Over the next 20 years rising levels of obesity could lead to around an additional 4.62 million cases of type 2 diabetes, 1.63 million cases of coronary heart disease, and 670,000 new cases of cancer

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- These new obesity-related diseases could lead to an additional £2.51 billion in direct NHS and social care costs in the year by 2035 alone

HOWEVER, SMALL SUSTAINED REDUCTIONS IN OBESITY CAN RESULT IN MEANINGFUL PUBLIC HEALTH AND ECONOMIC GAINS:

- Reducing the prevalence of overweight and obesity by just 1% each year[ii] below the predicted trends would save £300 million in NHS healthcare and NHS social care costs in the year 2035 alone

- This level of reduction in obesity rates could also lead to the avoidance of around 64,200 new cases of cancer between 2015 and 2035

CATEGORIES OF CLASSIFICIATIONS

Overweight is defined as having a body mass index (BMI), the ratio of height to weight of an individual between 25 and 29.9.

Obese is defined as having a BMI of 30 or over.

Overweight and obesity are associated with a number of conditions, including type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, stroke and cancer.

FOOTNOTES

i. Estimates are calculated by estimating the avoidable costs and diseases resulting from a 100% reduction every year in overweight and obesity prevalence below the expected trends. Note: Healthy weight individuals still have a chance of getting a disease in the model and current BMI and disease statistics are used to compute future disease incidence.

ii. Estimates are calculated by a 1% reduction in overweight and obesity prevalence below trend every year between 2015 and 2035. This leads to an overall reduction of 7% in excessive weight prevalence in the UK by 2035.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This modelling analysis shows that a small consistent reduction in obesity can lead to significant public health gains.

Building on analysis of the most cost-effective measures, this report examines the potential merits of different policy options in helping to achieve small, consistent reductions in overweight and obesity.

BASED ON THE CURRENT EVIDENCE THE MOST EFFECTIVE POLICIES WOULD INCLUDE:

- Introducing a 6am to 9pm ban on TV advertising of unhealthy foods and drinks, to reduce children's exposure to unhealthy food choices;
- Restricting online marketing of unhealthy food and drinks products to significantly restrict the placement and content of unhealthy food marketing online and reduce children's exposure;
- Introducing a 20p per litre duty on sugar-sweetened beverages;
- Examining the case for further fiscal measures on foods high in sugar, salt and fat, and increasing the affordability of healthy alternatives;
- Strengthening and implementing standards for procurement of food provided in all publicly-funded institutions and ensuring existing food standards are fully applied in all schools including academies and free schools;
- Extending front-of-pack nutritional colour coded labelling to cover as many food and drink products as possible in the UK alongside awareness campaigns to educate people on their use;
- Increasing access to recreation facilities and open space, particularly for deprived groups;
- Devoting greater, sustained funding to promote walking and cycling as easy and accessible modes of transport; and
- Developing a new accountability framework with food businesses. This would support and monitor action by the food industry to deliver on government-led national standards for reformulation and portion sizing to reduce free sugars, fat and calories in the food supply. This framework should be transparent and include independent and rigorous monitoring and evaluation of any established standards.

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Almost 3 in 4 adults are predicted to be overweight or obese by 2035



Over the next 20 years rising levels of obesity could lead to an additional 670,000 cases of cancer.



Rising levels of overweight and obesity could lead to an extra £2.51 billion a year in NHS costs in 2035 alone



CANCER RESEARCH UK

Cancer Research UK is a registered charity in England and Wales (1089464), Scotland (SC041666) and the Isle of Man (1103)

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