

EASO and the European Obesity Day

Established in 1986, EASO aims to promote research into obesity, facilitate contact between individuals and organisations, and promote action that tackles the epidemic of obesity. From Iceland to Russia, EASO has 31 member associations representing more than 4000 individuals in 32 countries. Through EASO, obesity is discussed in 28 languages! For further information, visit www.easo.org.

The objects of EASO are:

- To promote the preservation and protection of health and relief of sickness for the public benefit in the field of obesity and its related disorders
- To promote research, the dissemination of the results of such research and exchange of scientific information in the field of obesity within Europe
- To develop a deeper understanding of how to achieve and maintain a healthy bodyweight, and to manage and prevent obesity and its related conditions by those engaged in the study of obesity - healthcare professionals, health related organisations, governments and the European community

The scale of the problem - Quick Facts

- The World Health Organization estimates that in 2005 (the latest year available) approximately 1.6 billion adults were overweight, of which at least 400 million were obese.
- Once considered only a problem in high-income countries, overweight and obesity are on the rise in developing countries. WHO projects that by 2015, the ranks of the overweight will grow to about 2.3 billion adults and that more than 700 million of them will be obese.
- Globally, at least 20 million infants under the age of 5 were overweight in 2005, and IASO estimates that about 10% of the world's school-age children are overweight or obese, some 120 million children.
- In the 53 countries of the WHO European Region, experts estimate that 150 million adults and 15 million children will be obese by 2010.
- In the European Union 27 member states, approximately 60% of adults and 20% of school-age children are overweight or obese.

The health consequences of Obesity

The consequences of obesity are serious and risk increases progressively as BMI rises. Obesity is among the most important risk factors for type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke and some forms of cancer, making it one of the leading preventable causes of death worldwide and one of the most significant public health challenges of the 21st century. More and more diseases are being linked to obesity, including asthma, osteoarthritis and sleep apnoea.

Abdominal obesity, characterized by increased fat under the skin of the belly and between the abdominal organs (visceral obesity), is considered especially harmful, as it is particularly powerful in increasing the risk of heart disease and diabetes. It is increasingly clear that disturbed functioning of adipose tissue may be an important factor in obesity-related health risks. As people get fatter and their fat cells expand, the adipose tissue becomes less able to store fat and the body starts storing it in other tissues, such as muscle and liver, which may disturb cell function and lead to disease. Also, it has become clear that adipose tissue is a very active organ, secreting hormonal signals that may affect metabolism in other organs.

Recently, a major scientific review has concluded that obesity is clearly related to decreased life expectancy. Studies indicate that despite the shorter life expectancy, obese people have more unhealthy life-years, meaning they spend more of their life chronically diseased, work-disabled and with an impaired quality of life. Several studies estimate that 2%-10% of direct healthcare costs in western populations are attributable to obesity. The cost of overweight is estimated to be higher in many countries than that for type 2 diabetes or hypertension.

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EASO supports the European Obesity Day initiative and believes that a multi disciplinary approach is needed in order to effectively tackle the epidemic. Approaches should include a wide range of actions including prevention strategies, management (treatment), research, education and monitoring. No singular action will be successful.

EASO has developed, as part of a 3 year strategic plan, a series of activities aimed at addressing the issues affecting obesity in Europe. Actions include:

- The organisation of a major annual congress on obesity (the European Congress on Obesity)
- The promotion of scientific excellence (through awards and grant) in Europe
- The establishment of a scientific advisory board to monitor obesity science across Europe
- The organisation of meetings and workshops on specific topics around Europe (childhood, management, prevention)
- The organization of satellite meetings at related congresses throughout Europe
- The development of management guidelines (often in collaboration with 'sister' societies in our field)
- The establishment of strategic links with societies covering all related disciplines in this field

In short, EASO believes that awareness, public education and government involvement in developing strategies for prevention and control is required and we strongly support collaboration and interaction between all parties involved in tackling obesity and its many consequences.