Strategy for the Prevention of Obesity - Malaysia

Editors

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Malaysian Association for the Study of Obesity
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Foreword

Obesity has been a growing problem in most countries and corresponds to the steady decline in the prevalence of infectious diseases in the first half of the 20th century. The clinical relevance of obesity as well as its impact on public health became apparent in the 1950's when actuarial studies showed a close association between obesity and increased morbidity and mortality.

The increase in the standard of living in most countries is accompanied by increase in weight gain and obesity. Malaysia is no exception. Available data suggests that the prevalence of overweight and obesity in adults, adolescents and children in Malaysia is among the highest in the Asian region.

Many developed countries utilise sophisticated technology and highly specialised tertiary care to diagnose and manage the increasing number of obesity-related complications. Such services would require substantial costs. Similar demands in Malaysia will impose a huge burden on the human and financial resources in this country, all of which may complicate health care planning and healthcare priorities.

It is therefore imperative and strategic for us to intervene early before a typical dietary pattern associated with obesity becomes widespread. Similarly, we need to do much more to curb the sedentary lifestyle pattern and physical inactivity that is evident among Malaysians in all age groups. For us to be successful in combating the problem of obesity and obesity-related complications, we need to work with all stakeholders at all levels because obesity is often associated with multifactorial causes and therefore, to control it, we would require a multisectoral approach.

On behalf of the Ministry of Health Malaysia, I wish to congratulate the Malaysian Association for the Study of Obesity (MASO), and the members of the Technical Committee for their noble efforts. I would also like to thank all participants of the Consensus Workshop for their contributions towards the successful completion of this document.

DATUK DR. HJ. MOHD ISMAIL BIN MERICAN
Director-General of Health

8 December 2005
Preface

Given the magnitude and complexity of the problem of obesity and its prevention, inter-sectoral collaboration and integration are crucial to the successful development and implementation of obesity prevention programmes. There is an urgent need to enhance the professional understanding of prevention principles and practices; to involve all relevant partners at national and local level to develop supportive public policies and create appropriate health promoting environments.

This document initiated by the Malaysian Association for the Study of Obesity (MASO) in collaboration with the Ministry of Health Malaysia, describes recommendations to help prevent normal weight individuals from becoming overweight or obese.

Members of the Technical Committee include representatives from Malaysian Association for the Study of Obesity, Ministry of Health Malaysia, Nutrition Society of Malaysia, Malaysian Dietitians’ Association, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and Specialist Teachers Training College. The Technical Committee will have continuing responsibility for the review and updating this document to be conducted once in every five years.

This document contains information on definition and classification of obesity, prevalence and trends, health consequences and economic cost. Factors that contribute to obesity and their prevention strategies as well as recommendations for future research are also discussed.

This document developed through a Consensus Workshop is useful for the healthcare providers, other related professionals as well as educators to help them educate specific target groups, particularly families and communities, schools, healthcare system, media and workplaces.

The information in this document is not only useful but timely in sensitizing stake-holders and policy makers on the importance of preventing obesity and most importantly, sufficient leadership be trained at national and local levels to assure that these preventive actions produce the desired goal of “Healthy Weight for All Malaysians”.

I wish to thank the members of the Technical Committee for their effort and perseverance and all the participants of the Consensus Workshop for their contribution to the successful completion of this document.

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5 December 2005
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- All participants of the Consensus Workshop
  (Refer Appendix D)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Obesity has been described for some time as a clinically important condition that is a major contributor to many chronic diseases and disability in affected individuals; however it is only recently that it has been recognised as a population-wide problem that requires preventive action.

The Technical Committee comprising of experts in various fields and through an extensive review of the literature, has produce a document that examines the epidemiology of obesity, definition and classifications, environmental factors (including diet and physical activity), behavioural and socio-cultural factors in the aetiology of obesity.

The document discuss interventions across a range of key settings and in different population groups aimed at promoting healthy eating and increasing physical activity at a population level. It also describes potential opportunities for innovative approach of major stake-holders namely, the Government, related industries, family and communities and the media to combat the rising obesity epidemic in Malaysia.

The Technical Committee recognized that overweight and obesity represent a rapidly growing threat to the health of Malaysians irrespective of age, sex, ethnic and socio-economic status. The Technical Committee propose the following recommendations:

• Obesity is largely preventable through changes in lifestyle. There is an urgent need to prevent or reverse unhealthy trends in diet and physical activity pattern among Malaysians. Preventive measures should begin early in life.

• Obesity cannot be prevented or managed solely at the individual level. Communities, government, the media and the food industry need to work together to modify the environment so that it is less conducive to weight gain.

• A national action plan for the control and prevention of obesity is proposed to effectively combat the problem. This should be facilitated by the establishment of a National Steering Committee on obesity under the purview of the National Plan of Action for Nutrition.

• For meaningful comparison between population, the classification of overweight and obesity should be standardized on an international basis. The Technical Committee recommends retaining the WHO (1998) BMI classifications of ≥25.0 for overweight and ≥30.0 as obese.

• The Technical Committee recommends taking preventive actions at BMI 23.0 (representing increased risk) and at BMI 27.5 (at high risk) in line with WHO (2004) recommendation.
• A surveillance system should be established to track the problem of obesity in adults and children. This will enable timely and targeted intervention programmes to be implemented.

• Research should be supported particularly in relation to health consequences associated with overweight and obesity in all age-groups.

• The economic burden of overweight and obesity should be systematically evaluated.