

YOUR **health** MATTERS

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER 2003



Inside

OBESITY

a weight on our mind

EXERCISE

time to get on the move

DIABETES

the 21st Century epidemic

CANCER SCREENING

an invitation you can't refuse



Department of
**Health, Social Services
and Public Safety**

An Roinn

**Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta
agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí**

www.dhsspsni.gov.uk



Foreword

The people of Northern Ireland are living longer than any previous generation. Modern science has provided us with the knowledge and the tools to prolong life and to improve the quality of living. There is much to celebrate. However, there are ominous signs which suggest that all is not well. We may be forfeiting past gains and building a sick society for tomorrow.

Smoking remains the greatest threat to the health of our people. Cigarettes have killed countless thousands of our people over the past years and will continue to do so until we change our attitudes to smoking. But another great threat to health is emerging, the rising epidemic of obesity. We are now seeing the impact of weight problems which have soared over two decades and are now affecting our children.

Obesity is linked to a number of serious diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure and many cancers. Childhood obesity brings with it a greatly increased risk of these diseases in early adulthood. There is a stark prospect that all the great strides made in improving health over the past century will be lost within the next few decades.

This report outlines these major issues which impact on our health. We have endeavoured to present the material in a more accessible format and to distribute it to a wider population. It is hoped that this report will help to rekindle the debate on our health and how to protect the health of future generations. We welcome your comments and look forward to engaging with you as we strive to improve the health of all our people.

Dr Henrietta Campbell
Chief Medical Officer

Contents

Fresh Fruit in Schools	3
Obesity Health Crisis Looms	4
Every Cigarette is Doing You Damage	6
Diabetes – An Impending Epidemic	7
Who Needs Exercise	7
High Blood Pressure	8
Breast Feeding	9
Social Determinants of Health	10
Cook It!	10
Food Safety – Your Concern	11
Breast Screening	12
Cervical Screening	12
Prostate Cancer	13
Bowel Cancer Screening	13
MMR	14
The Truth About Single Vaccines	15
SARS Unmasked	15
Drug Use in Northern Ireland	16
Alcohol – our Favourite Drug	17
Catch The Vaccine – Not the Flu	18
Avian Influenza	18
Competition	19
20 Facts about the People in Northern Ireland	20

Fresh Fruit in Schools

What we eat affects our health. Fresh fruit and vegetables are an important part of a healthy balanced diet and will help protect against heart disease and cancer. Encouraging children to eat fruit instead of sweets at break time will also help prevent tooth decay.

In order to achieve these health benefits it is recommended that we eat 5 or more portions of fruit and vegetables each day. In Northern Ireland, research in 2001 found that 1 in 10 primary school children ate 5 or more portions and around 1 in 6 did not eat any fruit or vegetables on a daily basis.

Schools offer a great opportunity to educate children on the importance of healthy eating and give them the knowledge and skills to make healthy choices. The benefits to be gained from using schools as a setting to improve health and well-being are not confined to pupils only, but also to staff, families and the local community.



The 'Snack Pack Fresh Fruit in Schools' scheme has been running in over 80 schools across Northern Ireland during 2003. The scheme provides a free piece of fruit each day to all Primary 1

and 2 pupils in the selected schools.

The scheme aims to:

- Provide access to fruit for Primary 1 and 2 children, within selected schools.
- Promote awareness of the benefits of healthy eating and good food hygiene.
- Encourage children to develop the habit of eating fruit.
- Encourage children to adopt and sustain healthy eating patterns in school, at home and in the community.

The scheme is co-ordinated by the four Health Action Zones and early feedback has found that children are eating the fruit provided and are trying new fruits. Some are bringing more fruit into school to eat at lunchtime. Other benefits have been seen, such as a better atmosphere in class and children learning to share. Almost all of the participating schools believe that taking part has also helped in teaching other aspects of the school curriculum.

The Fresh Fruit in Schools Scheme is one of the activities resulting from "Investing for Health".

More information can be found at the Investing for Health website

www.investingforhealthni.gov.uk or from the Health Promotion Agency at www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk



Healthy Eating Rap

1 2 3 4 5
Eat all 5 and be alive!

Apples crunchy, crisp and sweet,
Make an apple your daily treat.

1 2 3 4 5
Eat all 5 and be alive!

Bananas thin and sweet and long,
Eat one now and show you're strong.

1 2 3 4 5
Eat all 5 and be alive!

Oranges juicy, nice and round,
Stand up straight and touch the ground.

1 2 3 4 5
Eat all 5 and be alive!

Carrots chopped and sliced and raw,
Make us the healthiest you ever saw.

1 2 3 4 5
Eat all 5 and be alive!

Cabbage cooked and served with our food,
A balanced diet and you'll feel good.

1 2 3 4 5
Eat all 5 and be alive!

Written by Sylvia Hodgins,
Belmont Primary School

Obesity Health Crisis Looms

Obesity has been described as a health time-bomb and there are worries that it could rival smoking in sending people to an early grave. In Northern Ireland around 60% of adults have a weight problem and as many as 1 in 5 are obese. The latter figure translates into 250,000 obese adults, with a further 500,000 who are overweight. Obesity rates have tripled over the last twenty years.

Currently surveys show that 1 in 20 schoolchildren is now obese by the age of twelve. A further

15% of boys and 21% of girls are overweight by this age. If the current trend continues, conservative estimates are that at least 1 in 3 adults, 1 in 5 boys and 1 in 3 girls will be obese by 2020.

The link between poor health and obesity is well documented. Overweight or obese people are more likely to develop high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes and cancer. Arthritis is also commoner in obese people. Their psychological well-being can also be severely affected

with low self-esteem being a particular problem. An extremely obese individual is 12 times more likely to die prematurely than someone who is at an appropriate weight.

Treating obesity related illnesses can be very expensive for the Health Service. One estimate is that in Northern Ireland between £15 and £20 million is spent each year treating obesity related illnesses. Other losses to the economy include days off sick and eventually an inability to work altogether due to ill health.

Reasons for the Increasing Problem

A person becomes obese because of the imbalance between calories eaten and energy used. Lots of factors influence our weight: lifestyle issues; the effect of advertising of foods; the growth of fast food and even people's motivation and knowledge of cooking.

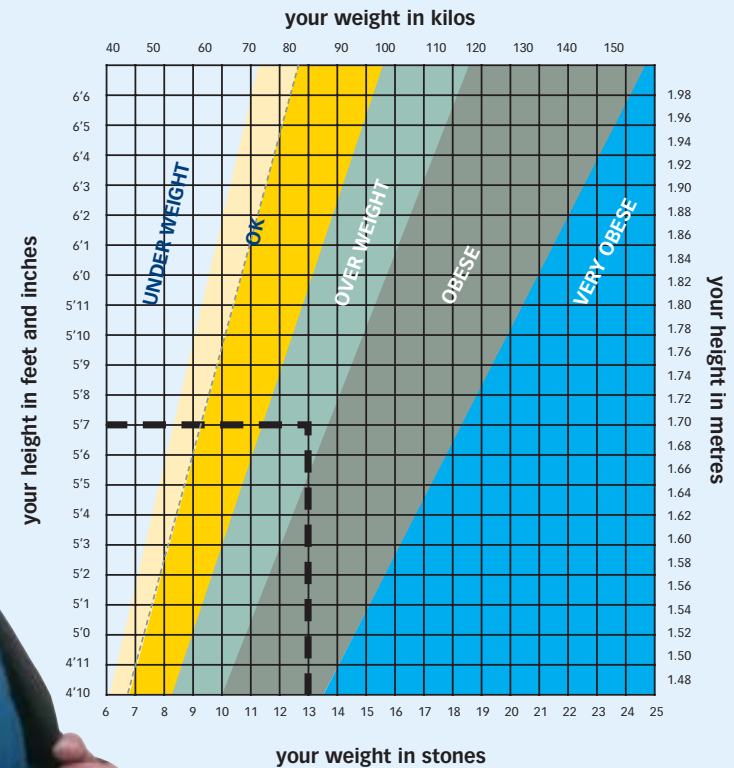
We are very fortunate in Northern Ireland to have access to a range of high quality local produce. However, there is an increasing tendency for many people not to make healthy choices in their diet. This isn't about blaming people but about understanding the factors which cause this and helping people to move towards healthier eating.

There is little doubt that people are taking less exercise than they used to. A substantial proportion of the population simply do not take enough regular exercise. Our lives are becoming more

sedentary and there is a tendency to use the car for even the shortest of journeys. We need to try to build more physical activity into our daily lives. Even small things, like taking the dog for a walk or using stairs instead of a lift, can make a difference.

This increase in obesity in children is an issue of such concern that a taskforce has been established to examine the matter urgently and recommend how the tide can be turned. In addition, the Physical Activity and Food and Nutrition Strategies are being updated and will recommend further action to reduce the number of people who are overweight. One target which has been set, is to see obesity rates stabilise to current levels by the end of the decade. Bearing in mind what has been highlighted above, this could be our most challenging health goal ever.

Check out your weight ▶



Are you overweight?

Use the chart opposite to check if you are the appropriate weight for your height. Body mass index (BMI) is the ratio of your weight in kilogrammes divided by your height in metres squared. Anyone with a BMI between 20 and 25 is about right in terms of their weight. If you are between 25 and 30 you are overweight and getting over 30 means you are becoming clinically obese.

How did you score?

- Underweight - you may need to put on weight by eating more
- OK - you are a healthy weight and you should aim to stay that way
- Overweight - you need to make sure that your weight does not continue to rise and try to lose some weight if you can
- Obese or very obese - your health is at risk and you need to lose weight