

WHO GLOBAL STRATEGY ON DIET, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND HEALTH

Contemporary public health is overwhelmingly dependent on a few noncommunicable diseases and health problems. Extensive research during the last few decades has convincingly identified several strong causal risk factors. Typical to these factors is that they relate closely to certain behaviours. WHO's Global Strategy on NCD Prevention and Control from year 2000 points out that unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and tobacco are main global targets for prevention of chronic, noncommunicable diseases.

The large international research work, published in WHR 2002, showed that how we eat, drink and move, together with tobacco, are of crucial importance for public health, not only in the developed world but also in most of the developing countries. Thus certain lifestyles are for individuals effective means for disease prevention and for the societies cost effective and sustainable way to promote public health.

The science base for healthy nutrition is very strong. There are a great number of international expert and national nutrition recommendations that are all very much alike. A cornerstone is the WHO Expert Report on Nutrition and Prevention of Chronic Diseases from 2002. Based on this background the World Health Assembly in 2004, after extensive preparatory work and consultations, adopted the WHO's Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health.

This WHO strategy has inspired and been linked with a number of activities in WHO regions and Member States. Global increase in obesity, especially among younger people, has become a major area in public political agenda and has further promoted policies and programmes related to diet and physical activity.

Studies and experiences in Finland have convincingly shown the potential of the role of diet and physical activity in disease prevention and health promotion. The Diabetes Prevention Study showed how changes in diet and physical activity can powerfully prevent Type II Diabetes. The North Karelia Project showed how changes in population diet and other lifestyles especially through reduction of blood cholesterol and blood pressure levels have dramatically reduced CVD rates and promoted health of the population.