



What the RCP thinks about ... **obesity**

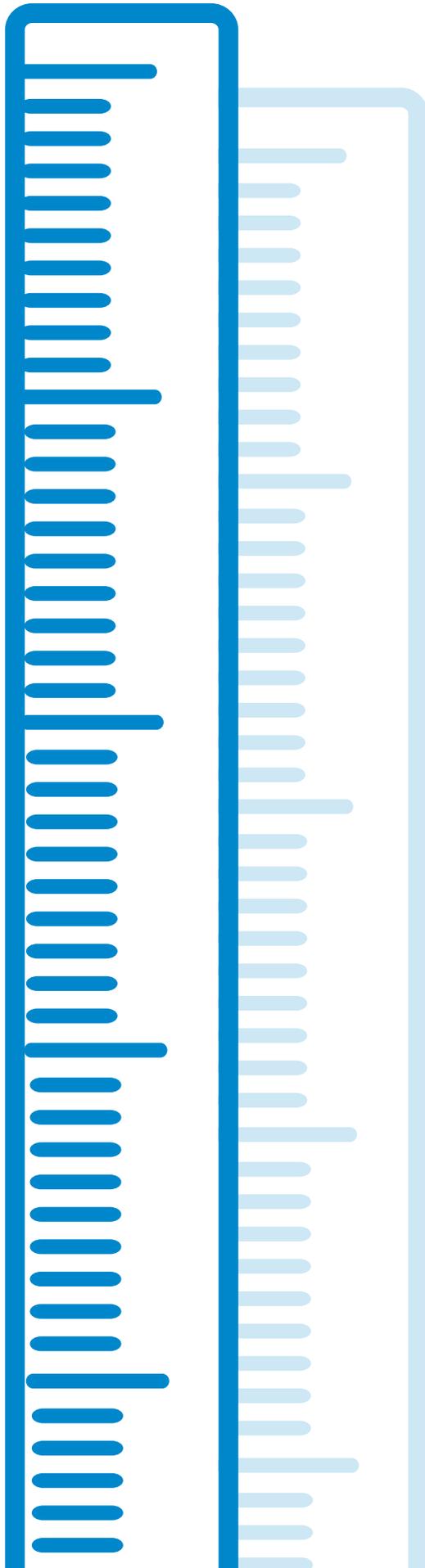
The issue

More than one in five children are overweight or obese in their first year of primary school. This rises to over one in three by the time they leave primary school. 40% of children in England's most deprived areas are overweight or obese, compared with 27% in the most affluent areas.

Almost two-thirds of adults in the UK are obese or overweight and that proportion continues to rise. It is estimated that 14% of premature deaths could be prevented if people were a healthy weight.

In 2007, obesity cost the NHS £2.7 billion and the UK economy £15.8 billion. This does not include the cost of diseases for which obesity is a risk factor; for example, type 2 diabetes costs the NHS £8.8 billion a year and the UK economy over £15 billion a year.

Advertising and marketing on the TV, internet and in retail environments are skewed towards unhealthy products. Research clearly shows that advertising of unhealthy food and drink can influence children's purchases, consumption and food preferences.



The RCP view

In 2013, the RCP published Action on obesity: Comprehensive care for all. It sets out how the NHS should adapt to meet the demands of an increasingly obese nation.

In January 2019 the RCP called for obesity to urgently be recognised as a disease by government and the broader health sector. Until this happens its prevalence is unlikely to be reduced.

The RCP is a member of the Obesity Health Alliance (OHA). The OHA is a coalition of over 40 leading charities, medical royal colleges and campaign groups. We work together to share our expertise and support the government in tackling the complex issue of overweight and obesity in the UK.

The OHA has developed a joint policy position. In order to protect our children and support parents, the government should address the following areas as soon as possible:

Protect children from all junk food marketing everywhere.

Close loopholes to restrict children's exposure to junk food marketing. There should be a 9pm watershed on advertising of unhealthy foods. Online restrictions should apply to all content watched by children. Rules should be extended to cover sponsorship of sports and family attractions, and marketing in schools.

Bring in the levy on sugary drinks.

The Soft Drinks Industry Levy should be fully implemented as soon as possible. Its impact should be monitored and evaluated annually, and any revenue generated through the levy should be invested in improving public health.

Reduce sugar, saturated fat, and salt in our food.

Incrementally reduce sugar, saturated fat and salt, as well as overall calories. Public Health England should continue to set ambitious targets on sugar reduction, and widen the programme to include salt, saturated fat and overall calories by the end of 2017. Compliance should be monitored, and non-compliance backed by meaningful sanctions.

Decrease promotions and displays of unhealthy food.

Make healthier choices easier by setting targets to reduce the display of unhealthy foods, and rebalancing promotions from unhealthy foods to healthy foods. These targets should be backed by regulation.

Include traffic light labelling on all processed foods.

Protect the UK's use of traffic light nutrition labelling as part of EU negotiations and future trade agreements. Make front-of-pack labelling mandatory on all processed foods. Explore options on how to communicate free sugar content of foods and help the public understand free sugars.

All schools to serve healthy meals and teach children how to cook.

Make sure that schools promote and facilitate healthy behaviour. Close the loophole exempting some academies and free schools from the School Food Standards. Make sure that teachers have the facilities, resources and funding to help every child learn to cook healthy meals.

Local authorities to have freedom to take action on obesity in their area.

Provide local authorities with the powers and resources needed to take action on obesity. This should include increased investment in public health and active travel, and giving local authorities and communities increased powers over licensing, planning and shaping their local environment.

Healthy food available in hospitals.

Hospitals should ensure that all food served, sold and promoted to staff and visitors in hospitals promotes a healthy, balanced diet in line with the Eatwell Guide. This should be mandatory, and independently monitored and enforced.

What the RCP is doing

The RCP will continue to work with the OHA and the government to implement the current Childhood Obesity Plan. We will challenge the government to take further action to tackle overweight and obesity from cradle to grave, in particular to urgently recognise obesity as a disease.

