



PREVENTING CHILDHOOD OBESITY

EVIDENCE POLICY AND PRACTICE

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WILEY-BLACKWELL



BMJ Book

This edition first published 2010. © 2010 by Blackwell Publishing Ltd

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Registered office: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

Editorial offices: 9600 Garsington Road, Oxford, OX4 2DQ, UK

111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774, USA

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Preventing childhood obesity : evidence, policy, and practice / edited by Elizabeth Waters... [et al.].

p. ; cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-4051-5889-3

1. Obesity in children--Prevention. I. Waters, Elizabeth, 1966--

[DNLM: 1. Obesity--prevention & control. 2. Child Health Services. 3. Child Nutritional Physiology Phenomena. 4. Child. 5. Evidence-Based Medicine--methods. WD 210 P435 2010] RJ399.C6P74 2010 618.92'398--dc22

2009038756

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Set in 9.5/12pt Minion by Toppan Best-set Premedia Limited

Printed in Singapore

1 2010

CHAPTER 18

Developing countries perspective on interventions to prevent overweight and obesity in children

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Summary and recommendations for research

- Although the prevalence of childhood obesity continues to rise in developing countries, the experiences of developed countries dominate the prevention literature.
- Diverse cultural beliefs, economic contexts, and social and political systems call for a suite of timely and comprehensive interventions that can be tailored to a specific population or geographic region.
- As countries progressively undergo rapid economic growth and urbanization, they face the challenges posed by coexisting undernutrition and obesity. Interventions must be sufficiently flexible in approach to meet the needs of heterogeneous communities.
- Evidence of both the effectiveness and the efficacy of nutrition interventions in developing countries is urgently required. While successful interventions may inform future directions, failure may also provide an important opportunity for learning. Attention to resourcing and well-founded partnerships promises to strengthen sustainability when promising interventions are increased in scale.

Introduction

Previous chapters have thoroughly discussed different types of strategies and interventions aimed at halting the growing obesity epidemic and its consequences. A growing body of literature confirms that effective interventions in a variety of settings, ranging from schools to primary health care centers, have the potential to slow down the progression of obesity. However, the vast majority of childhood obesity prevention and intervention efforts found in the literature have been limited to industrialized countries, predominantly in the United States and Europe. Reported successful interventions—particularly research-based—in the developing world are few and far between.

While important lessons can be drawn from the experiences of industrialized countries in implementing effective prevention efforts, interventions that have worked for developed countries may not necessarily prove effective in the developing world. A myriad of factors including cultural beliefs, social and political systems, and the diverging nutritional reality of low- and middle-income countries call for tailor-made interventions that fit the needs of the unique context of each particular country, region or community. In light of the rising incidence of childhood obesity in the developing world, countries cannot afford to wait any longer. Investing in the identification of the environmental and individual determinants of obesity in each country, and the most effective obesity prevention interventions and strategies to address them early on, can significantly increase the chances of millions of children to live longer and healthier lives.

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Obesity is one of the biggest public health challenges in the 21st century. Devising effective policy and practice to combat childhood obesity is a high priority for many governments and health professionals internationally. This book brings together contributors from around the world and showcases the latest evidence-based research on community and policy interventions to prevent unhealthy weight gain and improve the health and well-being of children. The authors highlight from the evidence available what is and what is not effective and provide recommendations on how to implement and evaluate promising interventions for obesity prevention.

This book is an essential read for all public health practitioners, early childhood professionals, health care providers and clinicians working to reduce the prevalence of childhood obesity in their communities.

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Edited by Peter Kopelman, Ian Caterson and William Dietz

ISBN: 9781405182263

ISBN 978-1-4051-5889-3



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