

Pacific launches flab fight in world's fattest region

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The new chairman of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) said Wednesday that he was determined to change the unhealthy lifestyle choices that have made his region the fattest in the world.

Palau President Tommy Remengesau said that junk food had become a blight on Pacific island communities, leading to epidemic rates of heart disease, diabetes, and [high blood pressure](#) among an increasingly obese population.

In a region that was once legendary for its muscular warriors and lithe womenfolk, Remengesau said he feared a generation of Pacific islanders had already been lost to such non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

"Our ancestors took advantage of the local produce here, vegetables and fish," he said.

"Now we're relying too much on imported goods, canned goods, which are giving you high levels of sugar, salt and fat."

A recent study by British medical journal *The Lancet* found that five of the top 10 fattest countries in the world were Pacific island nations, with Tonga leading the rankings due to an obesity rate of more than 50 percent.

Official statistics show NCDs account for about 75 percent of all deaths in the Pacific, and diabetes rates exceed 40 percent in some island

nations.

Remengesau took over chairmanship of the PIF at a ceremony in Palau on Tuesday night, and was out and about in the capital Koror before dawn Wednesday morning spreading his healthy lifestyle message.

"It's a hard sell because you can't legislate it," he told AFP as he set a brisk walking pace on his morning constitutional around the local athletic track.

"You can't force people to do exercise. You just hope to demonstrate to the younger generation what will work well."

Remengesau, a relatively lean 58-year old, said teenagers were now dying of [diabetes](#) in the Pacific and it was imperative that the lifestyle mistakes of recent decades were not repeated.

"I'm not giving up hope but if you're over 50 and you've got this problem then the priority will be to save the young ones," he said.

"My focus will be on the younger generation, how can we instill in them the discipline (to exercise) and the mindset that if you want to be a productive citizen you have to be a healthy citizen?"

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