

Why is Europe so fat? Questions and Answers

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This is an image of a weight scale. Credit: CDC/Debora Cartagena

World Health Organization research [published Wednesday contends](#) that Europe is getting fatter every year, and heading for an obesity crisis.

Gema Fruhbeck, a nutrition expert and president of the executive committee of the European Association for the Study of Obesity, talks about solutions:

Q: Why is the [obesity](#) problem so difficult to tackle?

A: Obesity is not like an infection (which can be treated), obesity is something that is going to be with us all of our life.

Technology has made life easy for people, while driving them to be very inactive. Even leisure time is very much related to computer screens and it is necessary to change the mentality of society.

The current economic crisis also has a [negative impact](#), leading low-income people or the unemployed to eat higher-energy food which is cheaper, rather than follow a healthy diet which is more expensive.

It is necessary to collaborate with politicians, urban planners, architects and sociologists to really change the whole framework in which the society addresses the problem of obesity.

Q: What are some nations getting right, such as the Netherlands where levels are on a [downward trend](#)?

A: It's easy to cycle in Holland, which is not the case in many other European countries.

From a political point of view, they are a nation that has been very pre-occupied about initiatives to tackle the [obesity problem](#).

We really need to be pro-active, so unless policy makers make the decision to have an action against obesity, it's going to be very difficult. And what we are seeing now is almost the opposite since it's becoming so frequent and so normal, many people tend to downplay the importance of obesity, many people say it's not a disease.

Q: What would you propose to tackle obesity?

We really need to put a lot of effort in educating our children about healthy lifestyle.

Most of our celebrations are related to food, social events where food is important. Try to be able to combine this in the whole of your life, so I'll have a very nice (meal) with friends, have a great time, but this can also be done by going for a walk and not sitting all day. We need a mentality change.

Taxes on junk food do not work because they penalise people with lower income.

Packaging is very important and so is labelling and telling the people how to read the labels.

Fighting obesity is impossible without realising that obesity is the gateway to ill health.

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