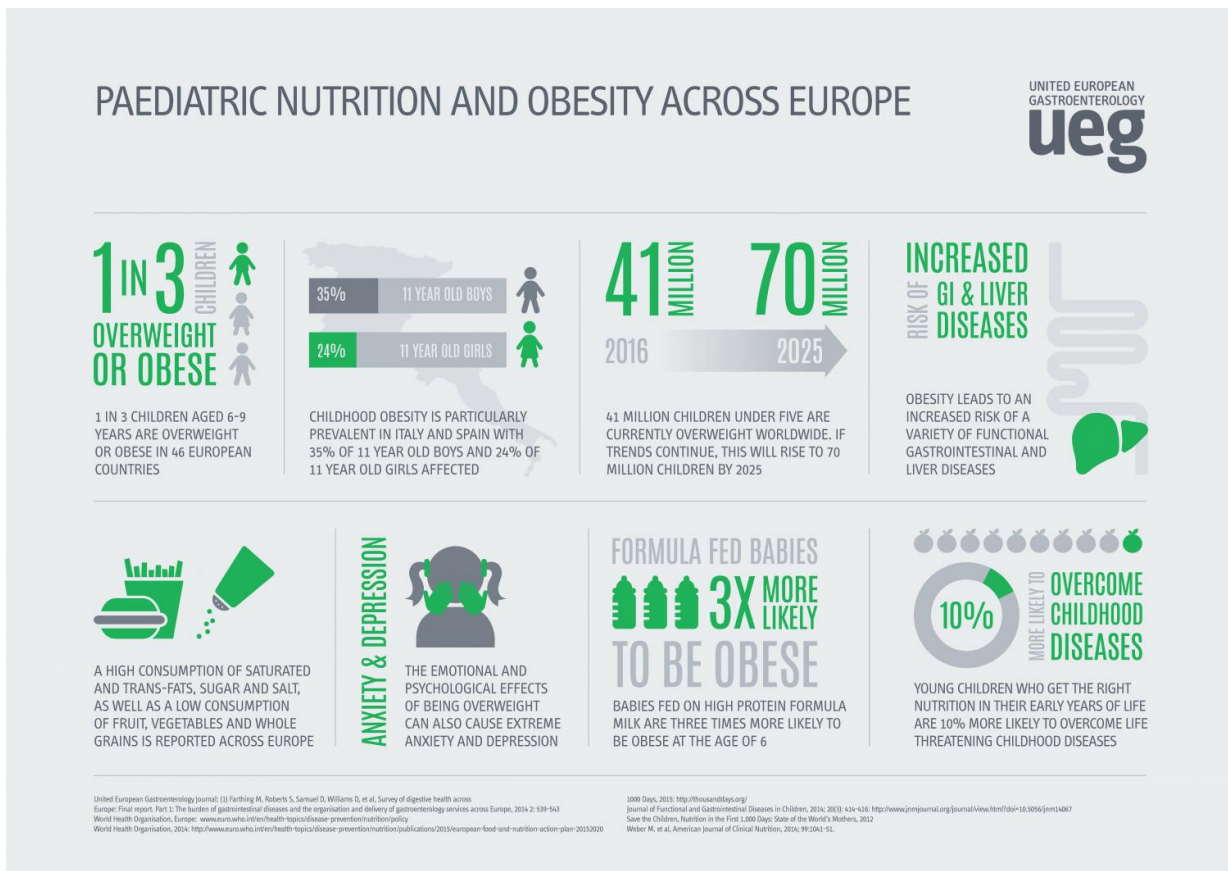


Children's digestive health across Europe in crisis

May 31 2016



'Paediatric Digestive Health Across Europe', commissioned by United European Gastroenterology, highlights how the current health burden and economic pressure of paediatric digestive health issues, in particular the increasing levels of childhood obesity, have become a pandemic issue throughout the continent. Credit: United European Gastroenterology

A report investigating the current state of digestive health in children has revealed alarming trends in disease incidence and inequalities in the provision of digestive healthcare services for children across Europe.

'Paediatric Digestive Health Across Europe', commissioned by United European Gastroenterology (UEG), is published today and highlights how the current health burden and economic pressure of paediatric digestive health issues, in particular the increasing levels of [childhood obesity](#), have become a pandemic issue throughout the continent.

The report canvasses the opinion of a number of paediatric GI specialists, including experts from UEG and current and past presidents of the European Society for Paediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition (ESPGHAN), who highlight three particular areas of digestive health that show worrying trends and require urgent action. These include:

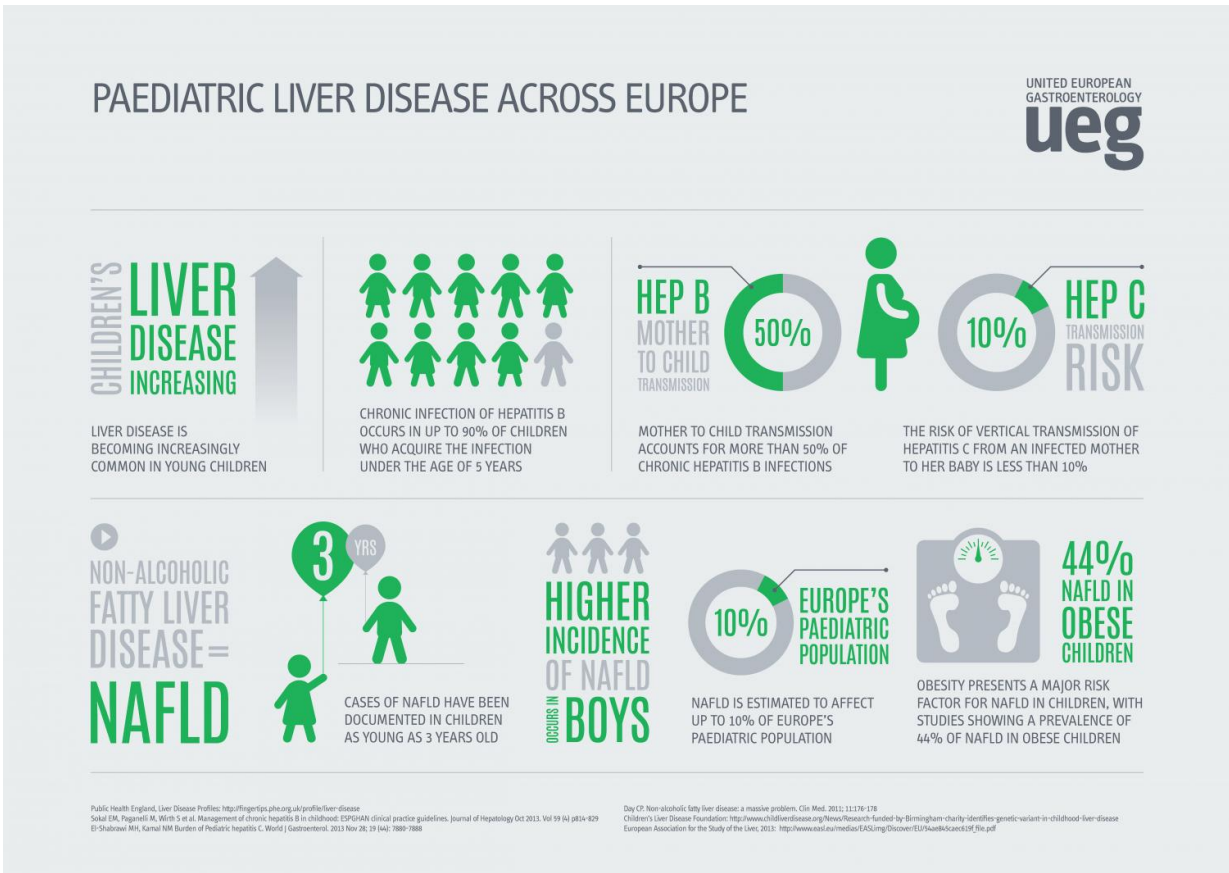
- In 46 European countries, one in every three [children](#) aged 6-9 years is now overweight or obese
- Childhood onset of [inflammatory bowel disease](#) now accounts for 20-30% of all IBD cases
- Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease has become the most common cause of chronic liver disease among children and adolescents in Western countries, with cases documented in children as young as 3 years old

Commenting on the current state of paediatric digestive health care in Europe, Professor Michael Manns, President of UEG, explains; "Across Europe we have leading paediatric experts and many centres of excellence. However, these are not widespread and currently cannot meet the needs of children throughout the continent. This has an impact on not just individuals and their families but on society and wider health service provision".

A call for change across Europe

One of the main findings in the report is that many areas of digestive health follow a 'one size fits all' approach with many children following adult care pathways. Professor Berthold Koletzko, President of ESPGHAN, comments; "It is important for stakeholders and [policy makers](#) to appreciate that children have complex physical, psychological and social needs and these must be met by trained paediatric specialists to improve the accessibility of optimal care for children today and in future generations".

The report calls for urgent attention and resource investment in paediatric digestive health treatments and services to improve the prognosis for children who suffer from varying digestive health conditions. A 6 point action plan, targeting key policy makers, stakeholders and health service providers, is outlined within the report to help encourage and deliver change and improve paediatric care across Europe.



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The 6 key actions are:

1. Further development of national strategies and public health campaigns for education, prevention and early intervention
2. Improve and harmonise training standards through the development of a pan-European digestive health syllabus

3. Enhance paediatric subspecialty training to understand the complex physical, psychological and social needs of children
4. Develop transition services as patients move from teenage to adult care
5. Encourage further research into childhood digestive diseases and early life programming to enable improved prevention strategies
6. Further development of specialised centres for the optimal management of children with digestive diseases

The report will be issued to European policy makers today at the European Parliament, who will meet with leading health experts to discuss the latest research and areas for development examined in the review. The report is unveiled as part of UEG's Digestive Health Month to raise awareness of digestive health issues across the continent.

"In spite of 20% of the European population being children and the incidence of gastrointestinal diseases increasing, it is extremely worrying that only 1 out of 58 topics currently receiving EU research funding is focused on paediatric health" explains Professor Koletzko. "Priorities need to change quickly to appreciate the specific issues of paediatric digestive provision and ensure greater investment into prevention, cost-effective diagnostic measures and harmonised training".

Professor Manns adds; "UEG hope this report will encourage policy makers, stakeholders and health service providers to adopt the recommendations and prioritise the development of specific paediatric focused strategies for improving the digestive health of children today and for future generations".

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