SMART CHOICES FACT SHEET   No.1

Childhood Overweight and Obesity: The Urgency

- More than half of the Australian adult population are overweight or obese.
- An estimated 1.5 million people aged under 18 are considered overweight or obese.
- Almost 25% of Australian children are overweight or obese, with the proportion fast increasing, particularly since the mid 1980’s. Overweight and obesity is already a serious problem in Queensland.
- It is estimated that over 5% of Australian children under age five are obese, which is already higher than USA.
- An additional one percent (1%) of children are becoming overweight each year. This is the second highest rate of increase in the world after Canada.
- This is a more rapid increase in prevalence than in the USA. In the coming decade, Australia is predicted to have a greater prevalence of obese and overweight children than the USA.
- Recent data from the USA Center for Disease Control and Prevention indicates that poor nutrition and physical activity, which cause obesity, will soon overtake tobacco smoking as the major cause of death. Obesity is now considered the number one health threat in the USA.
- The most immediate consequence of childhood obesity is social discrimination associated with poor self-esteem and depression.
- Children or adolescents who are overweight are also more likely to develop type 2 diabetes, heart, respiratory, gastrointestinal problems, high blood pressure and some orthopaedic problems, than children of healthy weight.
- Based on current data over 8,000 young Queenslanders are now at risk of the complications of type 2 diabetes due to overweight and obesity.
- In the longer term, excess weight gain in childhood and adolescence is now known to be predictive of adult overweight and obesity, chronic diseases (such as cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and some forms of cancer) and early mortality.
- Increased weight is caused by increased energy (calorie) intake, decreased physical activity or a combination of both.
- National Nutrition Surveys in 1985 and 1995 indicated that energy intake had increased significantly by 11% for girls and 15% for boys aged 10-15 years.
- This dramatic increase was due mainly to increased consumption of sweetened drinks such as soft drinks and fruit drinks, snacks and fast foods.