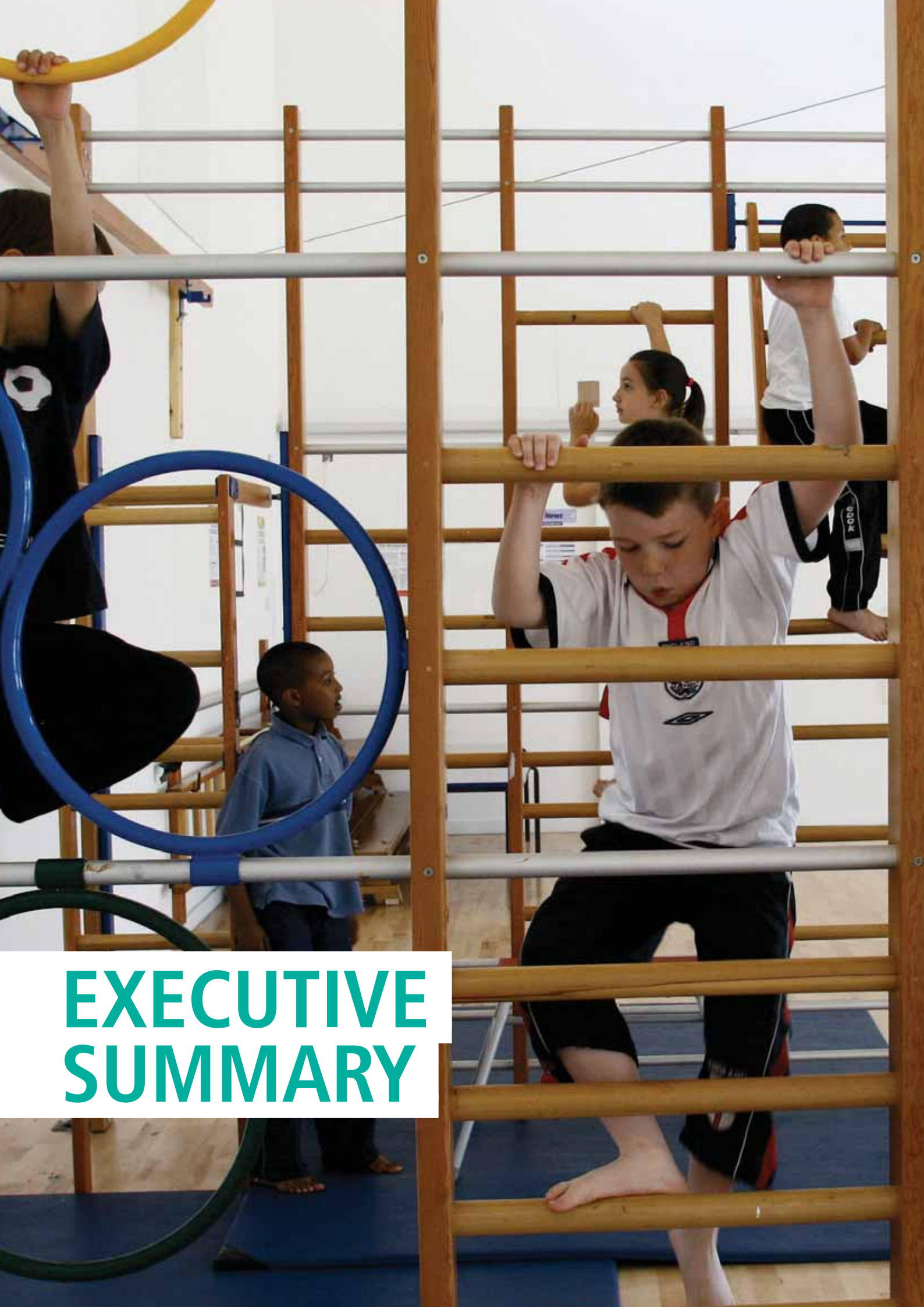




HEALTHY WEIGHT, HEALTHY LIVES: A CROSS-GOVERNMENT STRATEGY FOR ENGLAND





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Britain is in the grip of an epidemic. Almost two-thirds of adults and a third of children are either overweight or obese,¹ and work by the Government Office for Science's Foresight² programme suggests that, without clear action, these figures will rise to almost nine in ten adults and two-thirds of children by 2050. This matters because of the severe impact being overweight or obese can have on an individual's health – both are associated with an increasing risk of diabetes, cancer, and heart and liver disease among others – and the risks get worse the more overweight people become. They matter because of the pressure such illnesses put on families, the NHS and society more broadly, with overall costs to society forecast to reach £50 billion per year by 2050 on current trends.²

At the core of the problem is an imbalance between 'energy in' – what is consumed through eating – and 'energy out' – what is used by the body, including energy used through physical activity. While individual responsibility for decisions about energy consumption and expenditure is important, recent work by Foresight and others shows that a multitude of factors can affect these decisions. Genetic, psychological, cultural and behavioural factors all have an important role to play and these are difficult to influence. Foresight showed that the changing pattern of our lives, which equally affects food consumption and physical activity, makes it increasingly hard for people to maintain a healthy weight. From the nature of the food that we eat, to the built environment, to the way our children lead their lives, modern life is making it harder for all of us to fulfil our goal of staying healthy and well.

So as the Foresight report pointed out, we are facing a public health problem that the experts have told us is comparable with climate change in both its scale and its complexity. As with climate change, tackling the problem will involve making progress in a wide range of areas, and as a society we will only turn this round over time. Thirty years in the making, the obesity epidemic will not be halted overnight: this strategy is an important stage in what will be Government's year-on-year commitment to do its part to build a society in which we can all maintain a healthy weight.

Halting the obesity epidemic is about individual behaviour and responsibility: how people choose to live their lives, what they eat and how much physical activity they do. It is about the responsibility of the private and voluntary sectors too – a food industry, for example, that takes its responsibility to supply foods that promote health seriously; employers that make the health of their workforce part of their core responsibility.

However, the Government has a significant role to play too: not in hectoring or lecturing but in expanding the opportunities people have to make the right choices for themselves and their families; in making sure that people have clear and effective information about food, exercise and their well-being; and in ensuring that its policies across the piece support people in their efforts to maintain a healthy weight. The Government's approaches to early years, schools, food, sport and physical activity, planning, transport, the health service and other areas all need to support the creation of a society that fully promotes health.

Since 2000, the Government has taken action on a number of fronts to promote healthier food choices and greater access to physical activity, especially among parents and children. In particular, significant improvements have been made to food standards in schools, and to the amount of PE and sport that children do at school. England is considered to be a global leader for its introduction of both front-of-pack food labelling and broadcast advertising restrictions on food products high in fat, salt and sugar within programmes targeted at children.

However, the scale of the challenge dictates that we must do much more to give people the opportunities that they want to make healthy choices about activity and food.

To reflect this, the Government has set itself a new ambition: of being the first major country *to reverse the rising tide of obesity and overweight in the population by ensuring that all individuals are able to maintain a healthy weight. Our initial focus is on children: by 2020 we will have reduced the proportion of overweight and obese children to 2000 levels.* This new ambition was announced in

September 2007 and forms part of the Government's new Public Service Agreement (PSA) on Child Health and Well-being.³

To help fulfil this ambition, the Foresight experts suggested that Government could best focus its actions in five main policy areas – to promote children's health; to promote healthy food; to build physical activity into our lives; to support health at work and provide incentives more widely to promote health; and to provide effective treatment and support when people become overweight or obese.

Across all of these domains, the Government's ambition is no less than a radical transformation in the opportunities that children and adults have to make healthy choices, supported by significant improvements in information and, where needed, practical help. Tackling the obesogenic society that the Foresight report has described for us will require us to find ways to give real control and power back to individuals and families in making choices about their lives.

Because no country has yet succeeded in reversing the trend of increasing numbers of obese and overweight individuals, the evidence on what works effectively in each of these policy areas to tackle the rise in excess weight is less developed than, say, policies to tackle climate change.

So this strategy is the beginning of a sustained programme to support people to maintain a healthy weight, and sets out what can only be considered the first steps towards achieving the new ambition. We will continue to examine not just what more Government can do based on the best emerging evidence of what works, but also whether everyone in society – employers, communities and individuals – is doing their bit to enable people to make healthier choices. **Helped by a panel of experts, we will publish annually an assessment of the progress we are making in halting and then turning around the rise in excess weight,** including leading indicators of behaviour change, such as breastfeeding rates, food consumption, rates of physical activity and children's health. **We will**

use this annual assessment to develop and intensify our policy focus, as evidence strengthens on what works and on whether we are being successful or not.

Children, healthy growth and healthy weight

Our vision for the future is one where every child grows up with a healthy weight, through eating well and enjoying being active. In early years, this means as many mothers breastfeeding as possible, with families knowledgeable and confident about healthy weaning and feeding of their young children. As children grow, parents will have the knowledge and confidence to ensure that their children eat healthily and are active and fit. All schools will be healthy schools, and parents who need extra help will be supported through children's centres, health services and their local communities.

In this strategy we lay out immediate plans to:

- **identify at-risk families as early as possible and plans to promote breastfeeding as the norm for mothers**
- **give better information to parents about their children's health by providing parents with their child's results from the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP)**
- **invest to ensure all schools are healthy schools, including making cooking a compulsory part of the curriculum by 2011 for all 11–14 year-olds**
- **ask all schools to develop healthy lunch box policies, so that those not yet taking up school lunches are also eating healthily**
- **develop tailored programmes in schools to increase the participation of obese and overweight pupils in PE and sporting activities**
- **invest £75 million in an evidence-based marketing programme which will inform, support and empower parents in making changes to their children's diet and levels of physical activity**

- **invest in improving cycling infrastructure and skills in areas where child weight is a particular problem, as part of the recently announced package of further funding of £140 million for Cycling England.**

Promoting healthier food choices

Our vision for the future is one where the food that we eat is far healthier, with major reductions in the consumption and sale of unhealthy foods, such as those high in fat, salt or sugar, and all individuals choosing to eat levels of fruit and vegetables in line with recommended amounts consistent with good health. Individuals and families will have a good understanding of the impact of diet on their health, and will be able to make informed choices about the food they consume, with extra support and guidance for those who need help. The food, drink



and other related industries will support this through clear and consistent information, doing all they can to make food healthy.

In this strategy, we lay out immediate plans to:

- **finalise a Healthy Food Code of Good Practice, in partnership with the food and drink industry, and other relevant stakeholders. This code would challenge the whole industry to adopt practices to reduce consumption of saturated fat, sugar and salt among other measures**
- **promote the flexibilities contained within planning regulations, so that local authorities are able to manage the proliferation of fast food outlets in particular areas, e.g. near parks or schools**
- **ask Ofcom to bring forward its review of restrictions on the advertising of unhealthy foods to children, to begin in July and report early findings as soon as possible.**

Building physical activity into our lives

Our vision for the future is one where all individuals and families are able to exercise regularly and to stay healthy and well throughout their lives. Individuals and families will understand the links between physical activity, exercise and health, and will be able to take responsibility for their travel and leisure choices as well as increasing the amount of physical activity they undertake in their everyday lives, especially for children. Government, business, local communities and other organisations will support this by creating urban and rural environments where walking, cycling and other forms of physical activity, exercise and sport are accessible, safe and the norm.

In this strategy we lay out immediate plans to:

- **invest in a 'Walking into Health' campaign, aiming to get a third of England walking at least 1,000 more steps daily by 2012 – an extra 15 billion steps a day**

- **invest £30 million in ‘Healthy Towns’ – working with selected towns and cities to build on the successful *Ensemble prévenons l’obésité des enfants* (EPODE) model used in Europe, with infrastructure and other best practice models to validate and learn from whole-town approaches to promoting physical activity**
- **Set up a working group with the entertainment technology industry to ensure that they continue to develop tools to allow parents to manage the time that their children spend playing sedentary games, online**
- **review our overall approach to physical activity, including the role of Sport England, to develop a fresh set of programmes ensuring that there is a clear legacy of increased physical activity leading up to and after the 2012 Games.**

Creating incentives for better health

Our vision is a future where all employers value their employees’ health, and where this is put at the core of their business plans. The longer-term risks and costs of ill-health arising from excess weight will be clear to everyone, and there will be stronger incentives for people, companies and the NHS to invest in health.

In this strategy we lay out immediate plans to:

- **work with employers and employer organisations to develop pilots exploring how companies can best promote wellness among their staff and make healthy workplaces part of their core business model**
- **launch a number of pilots of well-being assessments throughout the NHS in spring 2008, where individual staff are offered personalised health advice and lifestyle management programmes linked to personal assessments of their health status.**

- **pilot and evaluate a range of different approaches to using personal financial incentives to encourage healthy living, such as individuals losing weight and sustaining weight loss, eating more healthily or being consistently more physically active**

Personalised advice and support

Our vision is a future where individuals have easy access to highly personalised feedback and advice on their diet, their weight, their physical activity and their health, providing them with personalised information to encourage healthy behaviours. People will also have easy access to authoritative but clear advice on how to look after themselves, making sense of the competing claims made about eating, diet, activity and health. When people are overweight or obese, they will have access to personalised services that are tailored to their needs and support them in achieving real and sustained weight loss, leading to the maintenance of a healthy weight.

In this strategy we lay out immediate plans to:

- **seek to develop the NHS Choices website to give highly personalised advice to all on their diet and activity levels, with clear and consistent information on how to maintain a healthy weight**
- **support the commissioning of more weight management services by providing extra funding for this over the next three years.**



Beyond this, the Government will invest in research to deepen our understanding of the causes and consequences of the rise in excess weight, and the evidence of what works in tackling it. This research will be part of wider efforts to develop our knowledge of what works by the newly established Obesity Observatory – part of the wider Public Health Observatory family, and sitting alongside existing Government research and development bodies.

Success will also depend on ensuring that the programme of Government action is fully resourced.

To this end, the Government will make available an additional £372 million for promoting the achievement and maintenance of healthy weight over the period 2008–11.

This is over and above the £1.3 billion investment in school food, sport and play and the £140 million further funding for Cycling England, already announced for 2008–11.

