

Three Quarters Is Too Many

A consensus view on the issue of excess weight in men and proposals for the solution

Men who are overweight or obese are significantly more likely to suffer from coronary heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, cancer and a range of other health problems. The present situation is nothing less than a public health emergency. Already two out of three men are overweight or obese - if current trends continue it is estimated that as soon as 2010 this will increase to **three quarters** of the male population.

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We believe it should be the goal of health practitioners and decision-makers across the entire spectrum of public policy that we should halt the rise in overweight *now*, so that this wholly undesirable milestone is never reached. If we do not take urgent and concerted action, men will continue to die prematurely, and very large numbers will not experience optimum health and well-being.

At a minimum, the following five actions are required:

- 1. Politicians, policy makers, practitioners, the media and the public need to recognise that weight is a male issue too.** The popular assumption that weight loss is predominantly a female concern may be the most important reason for lack of progress on this issue. This assumption almost certainly results in inadequate support for men and may generate a sense of resigned acceptance among those concerned with improving public health. Most of all, it perpetuates a myth which affects men themselves. These attitudes must be replaced with an acceptance of the central importance of this issue for the future well-being of the male population - and a positive willingness to meet the challenge head on.
- 2. It is important to understand male attitudes and behaviour in relation to weight and weight loss.** There is currently a major absence of knowledge about these matters. At the same time, it is clear that the existing, broadly "unisex", approach is failing men. Developing a better understanding is therefore vital. Unless this happens, men will continue to gain weight and will remain resistant to support services. Achieving such an understanding will require a comprehensive and dedicated national research programme.
- 3. There must be investment in new "male sensitive" approaches, particularly in primary care and public health.** There is an increasing recognition that men can be persuaded to take their health seriously provided they are approached in the right way. A step change might be achieved by simply making routine health checks (weight, waist circumference, blood pressure, blood cholesterol etc.) more widely and easily available (i.e. not just in clinical settings), and by promoting that availability in a way that will encourage male take-up.
- 4. It is essential to develop work on weight issues with boys in pre-school, schools and community settings.** This is important, not just because of the increasing levels of overweight and obesity in children, but also because the establishment of a healthy lifestyle before adulthood is likely to reduce the risks of later becoming overweight. As in the case of adults however, attention must also be paid to attitudes and behaviours specific to boys and to developing interventions that are more likely to appeal to them.
- 5. Ultimately, a wide-ranging national strategy on overweight and obesity must be developed.** It is not enough to concentrate solely on solutions targeted at individuals, important though these are. Likewise, the problem cannot be solved by acting just within the field of health. The problem of overweight and obesity can be tackled effectively *only* by "joined-up" action. Most importantly, such a strategy should take central account of the differences between the sexes in order to benefit both men and women.

The following organisations support and endorse this Consensus Statement:

Men's Health Forum
Abbott
Age Concern
The Asian Health Agency
Association for the Study of Obesity
Beating Bowel Cancer
BT
Central YMCA
Cholesterol UK
Developing Patient Partnerships
Eating Disorders Association
European Men's Health Forum
The Football Association
Kent Police
LighterLife
National Obesity Forum
Police Service of Northern Ireland
Roche
Royal Mail
Sanofi-Aventis
Slim-Fast
Southwark Alliance
Sport England
The Stroke Association
Tanita
TOAST
Walking the way to Health
Water UK

						
						
						
						