

Obesity and Cancer: Current Scientific Evidence and Policy Implications

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Abstract : Since 1997 World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF) International and the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) have been at the forefront of synthesising and interpreting the accumulated scientific literature on the link between diet, nutrition, physical activity and cancer, and deriving evidence-based Cancer Prevention Recommendations. The 2007 WCRF/AICR 2nd Expert Report was a landmark in the analysis of evidence linking diet, body weight and physical activity to cancer and led to the establishment of the Continuous Update Project (CUP). In 2018, as part of the CUP, WCRF/AICR will publish a new synthesis of the current evidence and update the Cancer Prevention Recommendations. This will ensure that everyone - from policymakers and health professionals to members of the public - has access to the most up-to-date information on how to reduce the risk of developing cancer. Overweight and obesity play a significant role in cancer risk, and rates of both are increasing in many parts of the world. This session will give an overview of new evidence relating obesity to cancer since the 2007 report. For example, since the 2007 Report, the number of cancers for which obesity is judged to be a contributory cause has increased from seven to eleven. The session will also shed light on the well-established mechanisms underpinning obesity and cancer links. Additionally, the session will provide an overview of diet and physical activity related factors that promote positive energy imbalance, leading to overweight and obesity. Finally, the session will highlight how policy can be used to address overweight and obesity at a population level, using WCRF International's NOURISHING Framework. NOURISHING formalises a comprehensive package of policies to promote healthy diets and reduce obesity and non-communicable diseases; it is a tool for policymakers to identify where action is needed and assess if an approach is sufficiently comprehensive. The framework brings together ten policy areas across three domains: food environment, food system, and behaviour change communication. The framework is accompanied by a regularly updated database providing an extensive overview of implemented government policy actions from around the world. In conclusion, the session will provide an overview of obesity and cancer, highlighting the links seen in the epidemiology and exploring the mechanisms underpinning these, as well as the influences that help determine overweight and obesity. Finally, the session will illustrate policy approaches that can be taken to reduce overweight and obesity worldwide.

Keywords : overweight, obesity, nutrition, cancer, mechanisms, policy

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