

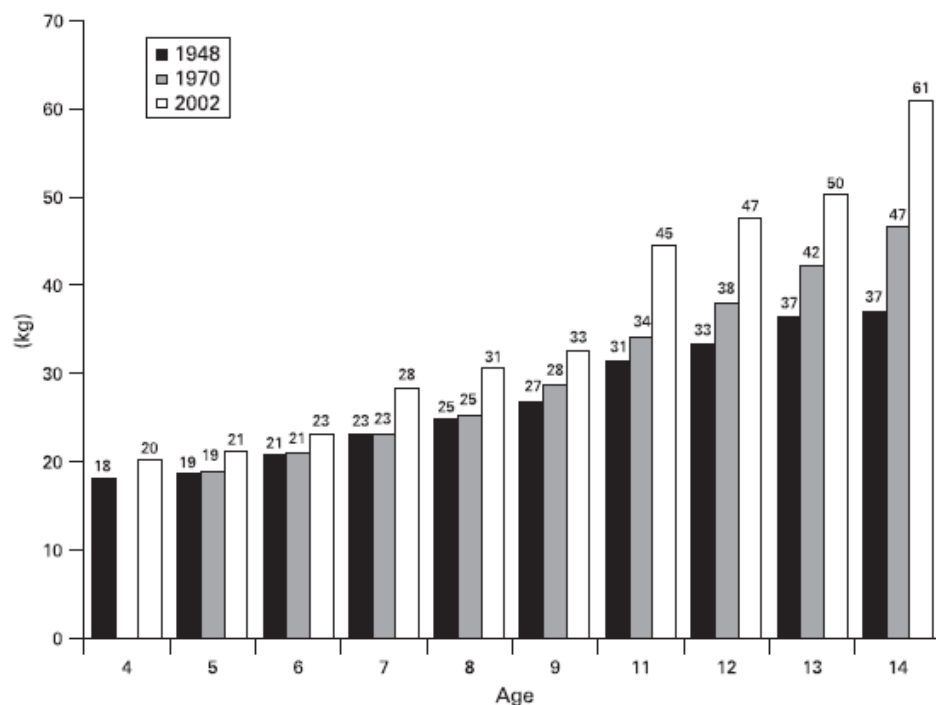
# Tackling Childhood Obesity

## Currently

*There is a near complete normalisation of the Childhood Obesity Epidemic, we are immune to the stark statistics, and we almost see the situation as inevitable and insoluble.*

*Here's how we as a society are 'nurturing' our families health-wise today:*

- *One in three expectant mothers are in overweight or obese category weight –wise*
- *Ready -to -eat baby and toddler meals are often sugar-rich*
- *Many primary schools have 'no running' policies, no fridges for lunch storage, no water fountains, lunch-eating time interferes with play time ...*
- *Parents are struggling to achieve healthy eating and active living for their children in the face of ubiquitous 'treats' (sugar and fat) and sedentariness ( screens and online games)*
- *Children in disadvantaged areas eat less nutritious diets and have higher levels of obesity*
- *Secondary school students are targeted by fast-food 'meal deals' and outlets near their schools*
- *Local shops, Newsagents, garage forecourts and supermarkets provide multiple temptations to buy, relatively cheaply, high sugar and fat 'empty calories'*



! Mean weight (kg) in Irish boys between 1948 and 2002.

## Our key recommendations: Resource the implementation of A Healthy Weight for Ireland (2016)

- A dedicated percentage of the overall obesity budget is required for obesity prevention to ensure a balance between prevention and treatment measures.
- Improved co-ordination between community and hospital –based health professionals caring for children and families with weight- related disease.
- Focus on those most in need by addressing socioeconomic inequalities.
- Establish a 70/30 ratio for Healthy Eating/Physical Activity initiatives in preventative measures. This is in line with evidence showing the relative contributions of diet (70%) and physical activity (30%) to obesity
- Support parents using a parenting approach; a family-centred approach requires parenting skills as well as knowledge on healthy eating and physical activity.
- Implement more community cooking programmes such as ‘Cook It’ across the country to engage people with healthy eating and foods skills at a local community level
- Make Home Economics available to all in post primary schools to develop basic food knowledge & skills
- Make measuring children’s weight and height routine in schools. It is well established that parents don’t recognise excess weight in themselves or their children. Normalising the measurement of body weight status will help overcome this barrier to behaviour change.
- Ensure all public awareness and behaviour-change campaigns use a social marketing consultative approach where the needs of the target audience are paramount to ensure health messages resonate with them.

- Reframe the conversation around obesity to avoid stigmatisation and promote positive action.
- Continue to integrate prevention into all consultations and contacts with health professionals in the life-course of children and families using the 'Every Contact Counts' approach.
- Continue the re-orientation of children's obesogenic food environment towards healthier eating including the sugar tax, the children's commercial communications and voluntary non-broadcast advertising codes, food standards for school meal provision and 'No fry zones'.

**safefood** has already submitted details of our work in this area including community outreach, education support, research and partnership working through our all-island Obesity Action Forum.



I wish to highlight our five year START campaign.

Launched in October 2017 by the Minister for Health and in partnership with Healthy Ireland and the HSE, this is a population-wide campaign aimed at supporting parents in making small daily wins to their family's eating, physical activity and sleep habits and to help start families on the way to a healthier life and prevent childhood obesity. The campaign will bring a consistent, practical approach with clear messages across all relevant sectors, for example in crèches, schools, GP surgeries and hospitals.

Thank you to the Chairman and the Committee for the opportunity to address you today.

***safefood** is an all-island implementation body set up under the British-Irish Agreement. Our remit is to promote food safety and healthy eating on the island of Ireland. Our activities include research and promotion of food safety issues; communication of nutritional advice; promoting scientific co-operation and laboratory linkages; and providing independent scientific advice.*