14th European Congress on Obesity

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Europe - 0.5 million children facing metabolic syndrome threat

Increasing numbers of children in Europe are suffering the classic health problems often associated with later life due to overweight and obesity.

High blood pressure, raised cholesterol levels, impaired glucose tolerance and other risk factors, which combined are often termed the metabolic syndrome, are being identified alongside rising levels of childhood overweight and obesity.

The numbers affected by frank type 2 diabetes are estimated to range between 2,000 and 10,000.

Preliminary estimates of the numbers at risk for obesity-associated disease among EU children

Hypertension	520,000
High triglycerides	830,000
High cholesterol	900,000
High LDL cholesterol	900,000
Low HDL cholesterol	710,000
Impaired glucose tolerance	90,000
Type 2 Diabetes	2-10,000
Steatohepatitis	225.000

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New analyses presented to experts at the International Obesity TaskForce workshop on childhood obesity today (June 1) suggest that children in the EU could soon be measuring up to their US counterparts where the numbers affected by metabolic syndrome doubled from 910,000 to 2 million in less than 10 years.[i]

Preliminary estimates suggest that 550,000 youngsters may already be affected by the metabolic syndrome in the EU. Already around 15% of the adult population of Europe has the syndrome's cluster of obesity-related risk factors for severe complications such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease.[ii]

In the USA the metabolic syndrome has risen dramatically in the past 10 years now affecting nearly one in three adults. [iii] Recent reports suggested that one third of all overweight youngsters (as defined in the USA above the 95th centile) were also affected.

[more]

In Southern Europe the remarkable shift away from healthier Mediterranean-type diets over the years may be contributing to the trend and a recent survey now suggested that in Greece alone 2.3 million adults may be affected.[iv] A study of "apparently healthy" families in Northern France had revealed a significant increase in metabolic syndrome over five years with the children of affected adults showing early signs of cardiovascular risks.[v]

"The metabolic syndrome presents two challenges. We must act swiftly with effective public health measures to ensure we do all we can to prevent the situation getting much worse with resolute action to protect children. That means vigorously pursuing the WHO global and European strategies to achieve real improvements in diet and physical activity and combat those changes in the social environment that are conducive to poor diets with too much fat and sugar and little opportunity to be active.

"This is more than just a warning signal – it is the red light: we need to call a stop to the continuing pressures on children to eat too much and have so little active play. We can no longer afford to delay the introduction of strong prevention strategies throughout Europe," added Professor James.

For recent developments on the metabolic syndrome go to http://www.iotf.org/metsyn

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