

FIGHT FAT

Since the 1980s, obesity has spread at an alarming rate. Changes in food supply and eating habits, combined with a dramatic fall in physical activity, have made obesity a global epidemic. The US National Institutes of Health defines a “body mass index” of 25–29.9 as overweight and 30 and above as obese. Across OECD countries, one in two adults is cur-

rently overweight and one in six is obese. Overweight rates are growing virtually everywhere. The rate of overweight people is projected to increase by a further one percent per year for the next ten years in some countries (Figure 1).

Rates are highest in the United States and Mexico and lowest in Japan and Korea (Figure 2). Children have not been spared, with up to one in three currently overweight (Figure 3). Severely obese people die 8–10 years sooner than those of normal-weight, similar to smokers, and they are more likely to develop diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer. Obesity is a burden on health systems, with health care expenditure for an obese person at least 25 percent higher than for someone of normal weight.

Cooperation between governments and the private sector is key to the success of combating obesity. A prevention strategy combining health promotion campaigns,

Figure 1

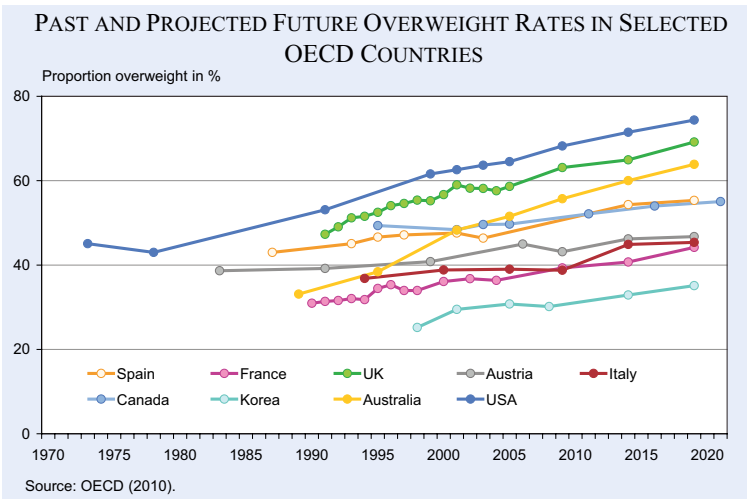


Figure 2

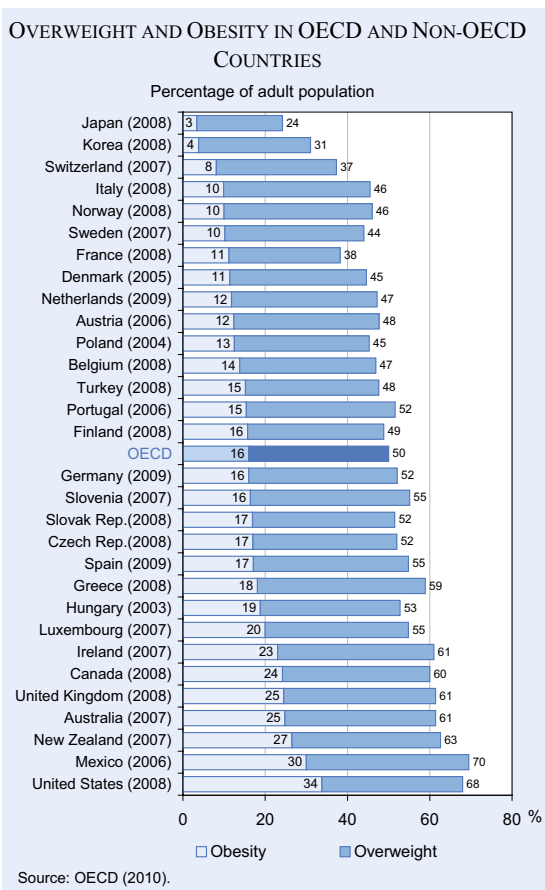
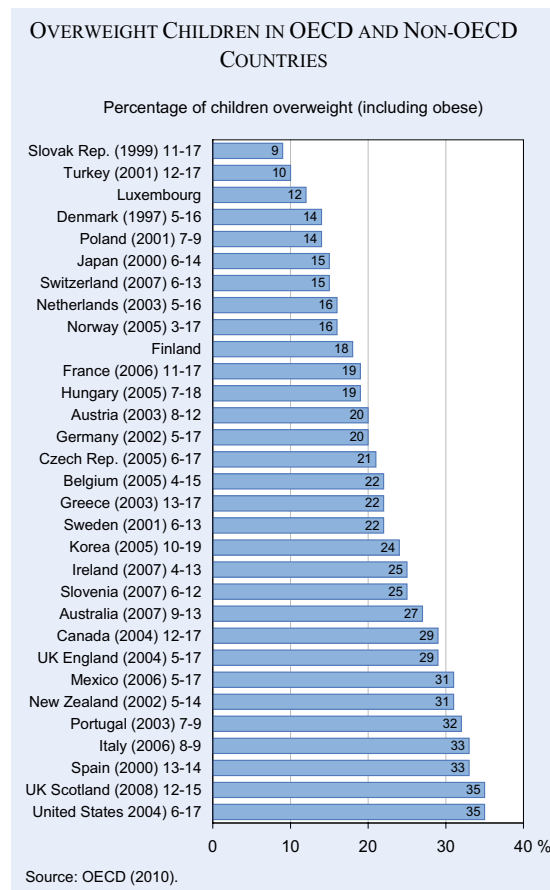


Figure 3



government regulation and family doctors counselling their obese patients would avoid hundreds of thousands of deaths from chronic diseases every year. It would cost from USD 10 to 30 per person, depending on the country. Failure would impose heavy burdens on future generations.

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Reference

OECD (2010), *Obesity and the Economics of Prevention: Fit not Fat*, Paris.