



## **Giving Europe's Children a Happier, Healthier and Smarter Future** **A European Call to Action**

European Breakfast Day on 24 April saw stakeholders representing teachers, dietitians, doctors and industry launch a Call to Action, asking European governments to take the necessary steps to improve eating habits amongst Europe's children – notably, by promoting breakfast as part of a healthy lifestyle. As research has shown, skipping breakfast is very common amongst young people in Europe and is associated with risk behaviours such as smoking, alcohol consumption and sedentary behaviours which can lead to the development of chronic diseases<sup>1</sup>.

Since eating habits developed in youth are likely to continue into adulthood, the World Health Organisation (WHO) is calling for early and continued interventions, and one of the simplest and most cost effective ways of improving health and well-being starts with breakfast. The WHO reports that the prevalence of obesity and high body mass index (BMI) is generally lower in young people who eat breakfast; these youths subsequently demonstrate improved signs of cognitive function and academic performance.<sup>2</sup>

As the problem of obesity and unhealthy lifestyles continues to grow in Europe, there is a concern that this will lead to an increase in chronic disease and higher morbidity rates. Since youth is an “age of opportunity” for action on addressing health inequalities, more efforts should be focused on guidance and health promotion programmes directed at children and adolescents.

National governments, along with the European Union, need to take stock of their nutrition guidance to their citizens, together with the science behind them, and work towards more effective, evidence-based policy making across Europe. This European call for action encourages national health authorities and policy-makers from across Europe to adopt the following approach to promote the health benefits of breakfast on a local, national and European level:

1. The long term goal of ensuring that, by 2020, all EU countries include the importance of eating breakfast in their nutrition policies, and monitor breakfast consumption as a key health indicator;
2. Have 'Eat breakfast everyday' added to standard nutrition advice, and include the importance of breakfast in school curricula and employee health initiatives;
3. Ensure that the World Health Organisation Europe “Health 2020 strategy” and European Union actions on health inequalities reflect the importance of eating breakfast to long-term health outcomes.

Together, members of Breakfast is Best Campaign and a wide range of supporters are calling on Europe's leaders to put breakfast at the heart of public health promotion campaigns and encourage Europeans to 'Make Time for Breakfast', as a significant but achievable step towards achieving healthier lifestyles.

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<sup>1</sup> Data compiled for the WHO from the Health Behaviour of School Age Children survey 2012. Affenito SG. Breakfast: a missed opportunity. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 2007, 107(4):565–569; Utter J et al. At-home breakfast consumption among New Zealand children: associations with body mass index and related nutrition behaviors. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 2007, 107(4):570–576; Delva J, O'Malley PM, Johnston LD. Racial/ethnic and socioeconomic status differences in overweight and health-related behaviors among American students: national trends 1986–2003. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 2006, 39(4):536–545.

<sup>2</sup> Utter J et al. At-home breakfast consumption among New Zealand children: associations with body mass index and related nutrition behaviors. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 2007, 107(4):570–576. Cooper SB, Bandelow S, Nevill ME. Breakfast consumption and cognitive function in adolescent schoolchildren. *Physiology & Behavior*, 2011,103(5):431–439.