

The Third National Festival on Health Promotion by Prevention and Control of Childhood Obesity: Isfahan Free of Childhood Obesity

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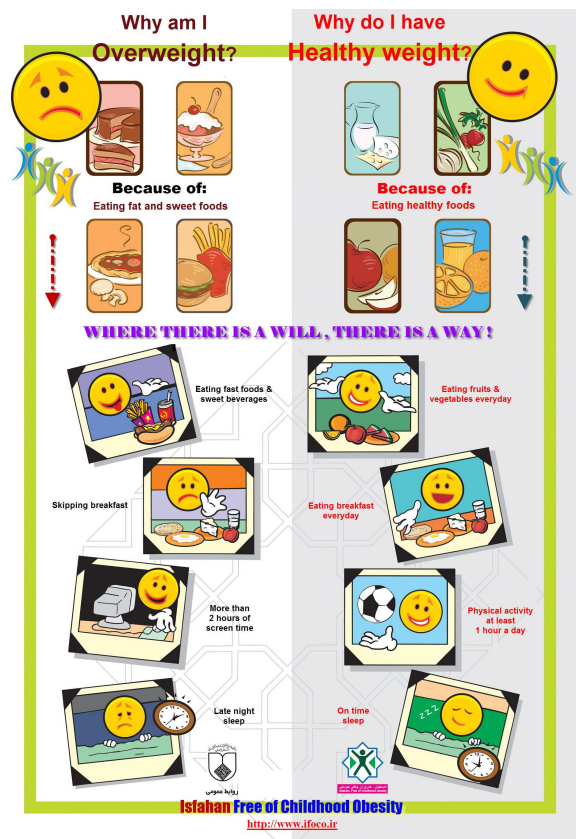
The third National Festival on Health Promotion by Prevention and Control of Childhood Obesity was held on August 1-5, 2010 in Isfahan, Iran. Similar to previous times,¹ the motto of this symbolic event was "Isfahan, Free of Childhood Obesity",



and it aimed to celebrate overweight children and adolescents who have been successful in weight control, to encourage other overweight children and families and to sensitize the community about health hazards as well as introduce ways for prevention and control of childhood obesity. The festival included four main parts:

a) Public education by city billboards, posters, pamphlets, mass media, poems, games, SMS and internet.

b) Training session for about 300 mothers and health volunteers about the importance of



breakfast for health notably for weight control.

c) Community gathering with about 2000 participants in a public garden near the river including fun programs and the scientific lecture of a faculty member of Psychology Department about behavior therapy notably for family lifestyle changes and attainment of skills on self-control for overweight children and adolescents.





d) Celebration in the presence of about 1000 participants, mostly from families who had an overweight child. It consisted of various programs including lectures, sports, fun programs, games and two scientific panels. Simultaneously, a large exhibition was organized and consisted of BMI measurement, active plays for children and adolescents as well as booths

presenting healthy foods and sport equipment.

Educational pamphlets (including recommendations on healthy lifestyle for reaching healthy weight), posters (including health messages and a poem describing healthy lifestyle habits to control excess weight) and a small reminder card with notices on quitting obesogenic habits were distributed among participants.





As stated in the comprehensive lecture of Professor Alireza Mesdaghinia, the Vice Minister for Health, Ministry of Health and Medical Education (MOHME), the main strength of the celebration was gathering the policy-makers (as the representatives from the Ministry of Health and Medical Education, Ministry of Training and Education, University Vice-Chancellors for Health, Provincial Health Education Organization, mass media, Recreational Division of the Provincial Municipality and Provincial Sport Organization) along with faculty members of various specialties (such as Pediatrics, Endocrinology, Nutrition, Food Sciences, Sport Medicine, Psychiatry, Community Medicine), National NGOs, private sectors (representatives of food and sport industries) and large number of families.

In his opening lecture, A/Professor Kamal Heidari, the Director of Provincial Health Office and the Vice-Chancellor for Health of Isfahan University of Medical Sciences (IUMS) emphasized on the free facilities provided by all health centers for measurement of children's weights and heights, consultations with families and referral of growth disorders. He also highlighted the well-intentioned collaboration of health services with other sectors related to children health such as the Education and Training Organization, NGOs, Health charities and some private sectors. As an example, he explained about this summer activities against summer weight gain and the partnership of the Provincial Health office and the Provincial Education and Training Organization in integrating free or very low cost facilities for physical activity of children and adolescents in leisure-time programs organized in schools and cultural centers, and determining body mass index (BMI) by health volunteers. Those overweight children and adolescents who could prevent additional weight gain and those who succeeded to lose weight after participating in the above-mentioned physical activity sessions and those who could use the information obtained from healthcare professionals to help the weight control of one of their overweight relatives were awarded in the festival.





Dr. Abbas Heysami, Deputy Director of Health Bureau, Ministry of Training and Education described the national policies on increasing physical activity and on promoting healthy dietary habits for school students. He also highlighted the close collaboration of his ministry with MOHME in screening, prevention and control of weight disorders.



Some other invitees of the festival presented their lectures in the scientific panels.



Dr. Hamed Barekati, Director of Child Health Bureau of MOHME emphasized on the importance of primordial prevention of weight disorders in children, and described the national health policies in this regard particularly the promotion of breastfeeding and free services offered by maternal-child healthcare providers for tracking the growth charts and giving necessary consultation. He explained that till now, most of the national child health policies focused on failure to thrive and undernutrition, but recently prevention and control of overweight have been implemented in these policies.

Dr. Dorouzi, Senior Expert, Bureau of Youths and School Health of MOHME described the health strategies considered in the national school health system and emphasized on the partnership of MOHME with the Ministry of Education and Training. He explained the national screening program conducted by these two ministries at school entry for different health aspects including weight disorders.

A/Professor Mohammad Reza Vafa, Director of Iranian Society of Nutrition described the rapidly increasing trend of overweight in Iran. He underscored the importance of rapidly increasing trend of overweight in children and its impact on the burden of chronic diseases.

Mrs. Zahra Amin, Director of Education and Research Unit of Isfahan Provincial Sport Organization described the collaboration of this organization with IUMS in providing special sport classes for overweight and obese children, and expanding these classes in public and private sectors.

Professor Roya Kelishadi, the festival secretary, presented the closing remarks. She highlighted the high prevalence of obesity in Iranian adults³ and children^{4,5} at national level with special concern that about 17% of children are overweight and obese at school entry.⁶ She described the multi-disciplinary and health-promoting approach of the festivals as part of the campaign against childhood obesity.^{1,2} She explained that this action-oriented approach is evidence-based according to qualitative and quantitative research studies conducted on facilities and barriers to children's healthy lifestyle in the community.⁷ She stated that since 1997, free services on diet, physical activity and behavior therapy are provided by the joint collaboration of the Pediatric Preventive Cardiology Department, Isfahan Cardiovascular Research Center, Provincial and Districts Health centers of Isfahan University of Medical Sciences with the Recreational division of the Provincial Municipality and Isfahan Provincial Sport Organization. During these years, regular celebrations have been organized for encouraging those children and adolescents who have been most successful in weight control. As the poll results confirmed the successful impact of these events on

the family lifestyle, they have expanded to reaching now the third national festival. Then, she read the final statement of the festival comprising 10 strategies for prevention and control of childhood obesity to be reinforced at national level. The statement will be circulated by the MOHME.



At the end of programs, special memorials presenting the title of "Health Promoting Family" were offered to 25 families who had the highest collaboration for supporting the weight control of their children. Moreover, 50 children and adolescents with highest success in weight control were awarded and 200 prizes were given to other children and adolescents with good collaboration in weight control. The efforts of physicians, healthcare professionals, health volunteers and other collaborators from different organizations were acknowledged as well.



To promote the festival, the Public Affairs Unit of Isfahan University of Medical Sciences featured the festival on the university website. The municipality displayed flags in all main squares and crowded parts of the city. National and provincial radio and TV broadcasting also covered the event. Different types of campaigns presenting picture questions by city billboards, posters, internet and short message service were provided from one month before the festival and will continue for two more months. The educational website of "Isfahan, Free of Childhood Obesity", www.ifoco.ir, provides educational materials in terms of health information for families, physical activity videos, healthy cooking recipes and videos, body mass index calculator, games, response to questions and other interactive materials for families (info@ifoco.ir).

This health festival was organized by Isfahan University of Medical Sciences (the Pediatric Preventive Cardiology Department of Isfahan Cardiovascular Research Center, Adolescents, Youths and School Health Unit of Isfahan Provincial Health Office, the Public Affairs Unit of the university and the Pediatrics Department), the Recreational Division of the Provincial Municipality, Provincial Education and Training Organization, Isfahan Provincial Sport Organization, Provincial Welfare Association, Bureau of Family, Population and School Health of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education, Iranian Nutrition Society, Iran Obesity Society and the Iranian Scientific Society of Childhood Nutrition. Some private sectors also sponsored the festival as the Chika International Food Company, Orchid Sport Equipment, Isfahan Swimmers House and some other industries.

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