

European Commission

Directorate-General

Health and Consumer Protection

Unit C4 health determinants

Dear Sir or Madam,

We read the Green Paper "Promoting healthy diets and physical activity: a European dimension for the prevention of overweight, obesity and chronic diseases" and we wonder why breastfeeding (as recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO): exclusively for six months, and then continued till two years and beyond, as mother and child wish) is never mentioned in this document as a means of beginning to feed children in a safe and sound way and of preventing overweight and obesity. As you most certainly know, there are several studies and systematic reviews, many of which have been carried out in Europe, that show a small but significant and dose/duration dependent effect of breastfeeding for the prevention of overweight and obesity. Moreover, if breastfeeding were practiced by a very large number of (ideally all) mothers, an increase in its exclusivity and duration could have a substantial impact on the prevalence of overweight and obesity at population level, even if the effect is small at an individual level. For this reason, breastfeeding is recommended as a measure for the prevention of obesity by many professional societies, including the American Academy of Pediatrics and the International Obesity Task Force.

We were therefore surprised to see that breastfeeding is not even mentioned in the above-mentioned green paper. This contradicts other important European documents such as "Protecting, promoting and supporting Breastfeeding in Europe: a blueprint for action" and "Feeding and Nutrition of Infants and Young Children - guidelines for the WHO European Region" (no. 87 of the European series of WHO Regional Publications) and the "European Strategy for Child and Adolescent Health and Development" (document EUR/05/5048378 of the WHO Regional Office for Europe).

We ask you to correct this omission by adding the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding among the interventions to be implemented for the prevention of overweight and obesity.

Sincerely,

Laura Castellarin

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