Hungary for a healthier diet

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Hungary for a healthier diet, byÂ Euromonitor International A new report from Euromonitor International, "Health of the Nation Hungary" reveals that Hungary is one of Europeâ€™s unhealthiest countries, thanks largely to a traditionally unhealthy diet and lack of physical activity by the population in general.

According to Euromonitor Internationalâ€™s report, 47% of Hungaryâ€™s population was considered overweight or obese in 2000 and by 2020 this figure is expected to increase to reach almost 62%. These rates are higher than many other European countries - in France and Sweden, for example, 33% and 38% of the population respectively were overweight or obese in 2000 and these figures are only expected to reach 50% and 52% by 2020. Indeed, Hungaryâ€™s figures are only slightly behind the UK, where by 2020, it is predicted that 62.5% of adult women and 71% of adult men will be overweight or obese.

Poor diet and lack of exerciseA diet rich in red meat, animal fat, and carbohydrates, continues to be part of the Hungarian lifestyle and despite increasing dietary awareness, consumers eating habits have not changed. Further contributing to the populationâ€™s health problem is their lack of physical activity. Although sport is a compulsory subject in primary and secondary education, the great majority of people stop exercising the moment they leave school.

Until recently, the Hungarian Government and health organisations did little to promote physical activity and healthier living. However, thanks to improving economic conditions and rising living standards, more time and resources are being devoted to health issues. It is now widely recognised that the health status of Hungarians is poor, and that the Government must promote physical activity if this is to change. Consequently, there has been a rise in the number of programmes organised to encourage physical activity in Hungary.

The Hungarian government has also recently taken steps to change poor eating habits and obesity in children by focussing on food available in schools. Effective from September 2005, the Hungarian government intends to address the type of food offered in school buffets and vending machines by making healthier ingredients mandatory. According to current legislation on competition, it is not in the governmentâ€™s power to prohibit the offering of certain food products. However, it can forbid the use of certain ingredients in the food products offered.

Changing habits of a lifetimeDespite recent involvement by the Government to improve the populationâ€™s attitude towards health, several obstacles to changing dietary habits remain. The traditional Hungarian diet is followed by much of the population and as part of the culture it is very difficult to change. Further, healthier food comes with a higher price tag, making healthy eating a luxury that the majority of the population still cannot afford.

However, increasing income levels and growing health awareness in Hungary means that eating habits are starting to change, albeit at a slow rate. Over the next ten years, Euromonitor International expects demand for health and wellness food and drink products to increase, which is expected to encourage production and push down prices, thereby making healthier products more accessible.

Euromonitor's "Health of the Nation Hungary" report analyses national health statistics and the health and wellness market. Health of the Nation reports include coverage of: government expenditure on health, life expectancy, mortality, physical activity, diet and weight-related illnesses, gluten and lactose intolerance, dietary habits and awareness of nutrition, the health and wellness consumer, media influence and market opportunities.

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