

Preface

The societal and scientific concerns related to the worldwide obesity epidemic have grown continuously. Scientists and actors in the field of public health not only aim at assessing the size of the problem but also they strive to better understand its causes. *Epidemiology of Obesity in Children and Adolescents* addresses both aspects from an epidemiological perspective while acknowledging that any approach to tackling obesity at a young age by primary prevention is most promising when based on a complete knowledge of its causes and characteristics, as well as a thorough understanding of mechanisms leading to this epidemic.

Part I of this book provides a comprehensive worldwide description of obesity in children and adolescents and the time trends surrounding this situation. It will also describe the known determinants of this condition in various areas of the world. This ecological perspective will give an up-to-date overview of the magnitude of the problem. It will also provide clues towards understanding the association between major lifestyle, social, and economic changes and the geographic/temporal variations of the prevalence of obesity.

As obesity has a multifactor origin, Part II of this book will address the contribution of the known and suspected risk factors involved in weight gain and the etiology of obesity. Each chapter in Part II addresses a specific causal pathway and provides a comprehensive overview of the current knowledge. The epidemiological perspective of this book is broadened by the inclusion of chapters that describe basic biological mechanisms.

Thus, *Epidemiology of Obesity in Children and Adolescents* serves two purposes. First, it gives a global overview of the obesity epidemic and second, it provides an in-depth insight into its causes and mechanisms: the understanding of which may help to develop more effective prevention measures.

With these goals in mind, we invited key experts and leaders in the corresponding fields to explain and summarize the current knowledge. We had the opportunity to work together with many of these experts in the framework of two large-scale epidemiological studies investigating the etiology of obesity and the development and evaluation of interventions, namely the IDEFICS study addressing children and the HELENA study addressing adolescents. Both projects were supported within the 6th EU Framework Programme. We would like to acknowledge the outstanding expertise of all contributors and their effort in providing the best available knowledge.

We hope that this book will be useful for a broader readership of professionals dealing with childhood obesity, such as: public health specialists, epidemiologists, pediatricians, nurses, dieticians, psychologists, health educators, health services experts, other health professionals, and policy makers.

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