

# A Comprehensive Strategy to Tackle Childhood Obesity

Dear Prime Minister,

We don't agree on everything, but we do agree on this. If we don't act now, the current generation of young children could well live shorter lives than their parents. We are writing to urge you to take bold action to tackle one of the greatest health challenges of our time. A crisis which is putting immense pressure on the NHS as it approaches its 70<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The UK is now the most obese country in western Europe.<sup>1</sup> This has disastrous health consequences. Obesity is the second biggest preventable cause of cancer after smoking.<sup>2</sup> According to the head of NHS England,<sup>3</sup> more money is being spent dealing with the health impact of obesity than is spent on the fire and police services combined.<sup>4</sup> The UK also loses £27bn per year in productivity to poor diets.<sup>5</sup>

Every year the gap in obesity levels between the most and the least disadvantaged children continues to grow. Our poorest families are twice as likely to be obese as the richest.<sup>6</sup>

The launch of the sugary drinks levy is a very welcome first step. But far more needs to be done. Unfortunately, there is no silver bullet, but we can win this fight. Progress in Amsterdam and elsewhere shows that transformative change is possible when a wide range of measures are applied at the same time.<sup>7</sup>

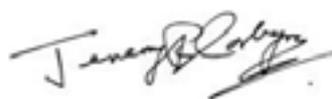
Young people must be supported in having active lives, but you can't outrun a bad diet. Further action to change the wider food environment is urgently needed to reduce child obesity. That is why we are writing to you now to urge you to launch a comprehensive and ambitious plan to combat child obesity. This full children's obesity strategy must include:

- An end to junk food marketing on TV before 9PM, and mandatory measures to stop junk food marketing to children online.
- An end to 'buy one get one free' and other multi-buy junk food offers.
- A ban on licensed characters, cartoon characters and celebrities being used to promote junk food to children.
- Further use of the tax system to make healthy food cheaper and discourage unhealthy choices both at home and on our high streets.
- Reformulation of junk food to reduce sugar, calories, salt and fat.
- Mandatory traffic light front of pack labelling and an end to fake health claims.
- Age restrictions on the sale of energy drinks to under 16s.
- Measures to help all schools promote health with appropriate oversight (by OFSTED in England) to monitor progress.
- Adequate training, tools, and time for health professionals to better support patients' nutritional needs.
- Support for food education and improvement of the wider food environment for workers. More support for working parents.
- Steps to encourage restaurants to contribute to tackling child obesity, including calorie labels on menus.
- Measures to ensure devolved administrations, combined authorities, and local authorities are equipped with the tools to help fight against obesity in their areas.
- The ambition to halve child obesity by 2030, with a clear definition and baseline, and clear milestones to measure progress towards this goal.

These measures are rational and evidence-based. In the medium term they will save billions of pounds for the NHS and generate billions more in increased productivity.

If you launch such a plan in the coming months you will have our support.

Yours sincerely,



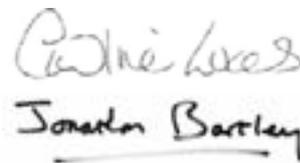
Jeremy Corbyn  
Leader of the Opposition and Leader  
of the Labour Party



Nicola Sturgeon  
First Minister of Scotland and Leader  
of the Scottish National Party



Vince Cable  
Leader of the Liberal Democrats



Caroline Lucas and Jonathan Bartley  
Co-leaders of the Green Party of  
England and Wales

**References:**

- 1 <https://www.oecd.org/els/health-systems/Obesity-Update-2017.pdf>
- 2 <http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/causes-of-cancer/obesity-weight-and-cancer>
- 3 <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/jul/19/nhs-chief-sets-out-blueprint-for-bold-and-broad-reforms>
- 4 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-matters-obesity-and-the-food-environment/health-matters-obesity-and-the-food-environment--2>
- 5 [https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Business%20Functions/Economic%20Studies%20TEMP/Our%20Insights/How%20the%20world%20could%20better%20fight%20obesity/MGI\\_Overcoming\\_obesity\\_Full\\_report.ashx](https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Business%20Functions/Economic%20Studies%20TEMP/Our%20Insights/How%20the%20world%20could%20better%20fight%20obesity/MGI_Overcoming_obesity_Full_report.ashx)
- 6 Pereira, A.L., Handa, S. and Holmqvist, G. Prevalence and Correlates of Food Insecurity Among Children Across the Globe, Innocenti Working Paper 2017-09, UNICEF Office of Research, Florence
- 7 <http://www.obesityactionsotland.org/international-learning/amsterdam/amsterdam-tackles-childhood-obesity/>