

WAGGGS POSITION STATEMENT

Making healthy food choices

The World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) is committed to ensuring that girls and young women have access to knowledge which enables them to make healthy food choices. As the voice of girls and young women, WAGGGS has identified making healthy food choices a priority issue on which to take a stand and speak out.

WAGGGS provides millions of girls and young women with non-formal education, giving them the opportunity to develop self-esteem, confidence and life skills. Working with Member Organizations in 144 countries, our vision is to build a better world through advocacy and action. We aim not only to speak out on behalf of girls and young women everywhere, but also to empower young women to speak out for themselves.

Healthy Food Choices Globally

- Throughout adolescence, girls and young women undergo dramatic changes in their physical, social, cognitive and emotional development. At a time when nutrient requirements peak, the lifestyles of young women may compromise their food intake placing them at risk of nutritional imbalances.
- Emotional health, self-esteem and body image play a critical role in girls' attitudes towards diet and exercise and although they know about healthy foods and eating behaviours, they do not always put this knowledge into practice.
- While 854 million people across the world are hungry and more than 16,000 children die from hunger-related causes every day¹, the world is also facing a global epidemic of obesity and overweight. Changes in diet worldwide, linked to economic growth, urbanization and globalization of food markets have led to increased levels of obesity and overweight.
- In the United States, approximately nine million children over the age of six are obese, and since 1980, the percentage of overweight girls aged 6-19 has more than doubled². The prevalence of excess body weight (including obesity) in 13 to 15 year olds is increasing in the Europe region, ranging from five percent to almost 35 percent in some countries³.
- Obesity and overweight is not only a problem for industrialized societies but increasingly is cause for concern in less developed countries. In Thailand the prevalence of obesity in five to 12 year-olds rose from 12.5 percent to 15.6 percent in just two years⁴. Though data on obesity in the developing world is limited, preliminary studies indicate that children affected by obesity suffer some of the same nutrient deficiencies which occur in hungry children.
- Reduced levels of physical activity amongst young people is another reason why levels of obesity and overweight are increasing. There has been a worldwide shift in levels of

1 State of Food Insecurity in the World 2006, Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO)

2 The New Normal- what girls say about healthy living Executive Summary GS USA

3 "Prevalence of excess body weight and obesity in children and adolescents", World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe, May 2007

4 Diet, Nutrition and the Prevention of Chronic Disease, Report of a Joint WHO/FAO Expert Consultation, Geneva 2003

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physical activity due to changes in employment, and the increasing use of technology in the home, automated transport, and more sedentary leisure pursuits.

- The ability of girls and young women to “make healthy food choices” also depends on a range of other external factors, such as their socio-economic status, food prices, availability and access to adequate information about different types of food as well as individual preferences and cultural values.
- Obesity and being overweight also affects the emotional and mental health of young people. Research suggests that the self-esteem of children is affected by their weight, and that children who are severely overweight experience greater fear and sadness, and are less able to pay attention in school⁵.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) has developed the Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health (DPAS) and in the WHO European Region a Charter on Counteracting Obesity was adopted in 2006 committing Ministers to take action at a national and regional level.
- Conversely, too much focus on weight issues can lead to development of eating disorders such as anorexia or bulimia nervosa where a person has an intense fear of gaining weight and a distorted perception of their weight and body shape.
- Dieting is one of the greatest risk factors for the development of eating disorders particularly for girls and young women living in western societies. It is estimated that one percent of girls in Europe suffer from anorexia and four percent from bulimia, because of the belief that women should conform to a certain body type, and the perception, perpetuated by the media, that being thin is a sign of success and attractiveness⁶.
- Unhealthy eating habits established in childhood are likely to continue into adulthood and can lead to a range of medical problems such as heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, stroke, cancer and asthma in later life.

Refer also to WAGGGS Position Statements on the “Right to Food” and “Discover Your Potential”.

⁵ Weighing In Helping Girls be Healthy Today, Healthy Tomorrow Research review Girl Scouts USA

⁶ Young Women's Guide to Equality between Women and Men in Europe” European Women's Lobby May 2001 p10

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WAGGGS calls on the international community and national governments to address the full spectrum of issues that affect girls and young women’s ability to make healthy food choices by:

- **Supporting** those involved in efforts to improve dietary and physical activity patterns amongst children and young people and helping to create conditions to promote the development of combined strategies to counteract obesity and promote healthy eating and increased physical activity
- **Recognizing** the particular role that youth organizations such as Girl Guide/Girl Scouts can play to educate young women to “make healthy food choices” and to promote healthy lifestyles
- **Taking action** to address the needs of the poorest sections of the population, increasing the availability and reducing the price of healthy foods making the healthy choice an easy choice
- **Developing** policies on healthy eating and physical activity which recognize the particular perspective of girls and young women including the importance of body image, emotional well-being and self-esteem
- **Encouraging** manufacturers to reduce fats and sugars and improve vitamin and nutrient content in processed food and provide better labelling of the nutritional content of foods and prevent the marketing of unhealthy food and drinks to children and adolescents

WAGGGS urges Member Organizations to:

- **Develop** an understanding of the needs and attitudes of girls and young women regarding healthy eating and physical activity and reflect these in their educational programmes
- **Advocate** for measures at a national level which promote the healthy eating, physical activity, and emotional well-being of girls and young women
- **Build** networks and action groups to promote the availability of healthy foods and possibilities for physical activity
- **Organize** campaigns and events that will stimulate action by all stakeholders to promote healthy eating choices amongst young people

How WAGGGS is helping girls and young women make healthy food choices:

- Issues relating to healthy eating form part of the *Right to Food* project developed in partnership with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).
- As part of the activities for World Thinking Day 2005, Girl Guides and Girl Scouts around the world were able to learn together what foods are healthy to eat, and to share information about good eating habits and the essential foods that can affect their health throughout their life.



girls worldwide say
“make healthy food choices”

World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts
Association mondiale des Guides et des Eclaireuses
Asociación Mundial de las Guías Scouts

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CASE STUDIES

Reality Check on healthy eating by Girl Guiding UK

In 2005, Girlguiding UK produced a series of fact sheets for leaders on health issues called Reality Checks. One of these focused on Food: highlighting the importance of a healthy and balanced diet for young people, identifying health problems related to diet, such as eating disorders, and highlighting the importance of physical exercise for the general health and well-being of girls and young women.

Girlguiding UK has also produced a number of publications for members of all ages to help them think about healthy eating and body image.

WAGGGS World Thinking Day 2005

World Thinking Day 2005 was themed 'Food for thought' and aimed to give Girl Guides and Girls Scouts the opportunity to learn more about healthy food.

Activities to celebrate World Thinking Day 2005 Food included:

Learning about the different food groups we need to keep us healthy – why not create a food mural using paint and collage to show what you've learnt?

Logging on to WAGGGS website and swap recipes and stories with Girl Guides and Girl Scouts from other countries.

Inspired by the theme of World Thinking Day 2005 the Danish Guide and Scout Association produced a brochure on healthy eating and food issues around the world that was distributed to members and partners in Denmark.

Healthy Eating Ambassadors Plan

The Hong Kong Girl Guides Association has launched an educational programme which aims to promote healthy eating in schools through peer education. Brownies become ambassadors and use the healthy eating kit to educate their friends and help them to practice healthy eating habits. When they have successfully completed a series of challenges, the Brownies receive a badge.

“We have only to look at the daily headlines to know that overweight and obesity are overtaking our societies resulting from poor diets and lack of physical activity. Overweight and obesity are particularly growing in the female population globally.”

Dr Catherine Le Galès-Camus, Assistant Director General, Non-communicable diseases and mental health, The World Health Organization

“We must make the healthy choice the easy choice.”

Dr Hans Hoogervorst, Minister of Health, Welfare and Sport, the Netherlands

Please also refer to WAGGGS position statements on the right to food and girls' self esteem and empowerment.