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## Obesity: Don't just blame the kids and food

"Avoiding obesity is simple," Dr Bruce Mitchell, President of Sports Medicine Australia (SMA), said today. "Energy intake (food) must equal energy expenditure (physical activity) - this is called energy balance.

"As long as a person remains in energy balance then excessive weight gain under most circumstances is unlikely. The problem that Australia is facing is that an increasing proportion of the population is not in energy balance and therefore we are seeing dramatic increases in the rates of overweight and obesity.

"Sports Medicine Australia commends the Australian Medical Association (AMA) for its recent '*Position Statement on Nutrition*' and supports all of the initiatives listed in the Statement," Dr Mitchell said. "However, more is needed."

SMA spokesperson on Public Health, Professor Wendy Brown, says that SMA believes that a national strategy to tackle the problem of obesity needs to take a wider focus than detailed in the AMA statement. "This wider focus must also address the issue of physical activity and must also look at the problem across the whole population - not just in children.

"Attacking energy intake alone ignores the other side of the energy balance equation. It is essential that as a nation and as individuals we also look at energy expenditure - our levels of physical activity," Professor Brown said.

"Further, we know from demographic data that, while the issue of obesity in children is unparalleled and alarming, the greatest impact of obesity on the health system and the economy will come in the short term from the baby-boomers (those aged 45-60), the largest segment of the Australian population.

"The baby boomers have much higher levels of overweight (52%) and obesity (21%) and lower levels of physical activity -- only 40% are sufficiently active for health benefit -- than any other age group in the population.

"Most alarmingly, these figures demonstrate the difficulty of obesity-proofing the population in childhood," Professor Brown said. "The sad fact is that, in childhood, the current baby boomers had an obesity rate of only about 1% - most of them gained their excess weight in adulthood."

"SMA believes what is needed is national leadership and national action on a scale not yet seen. We need to address both energy expenditure as well as energy intake. The first step is facing up to the true dimensions of the problem - the second is being prepared to pay the price of addressing it."

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