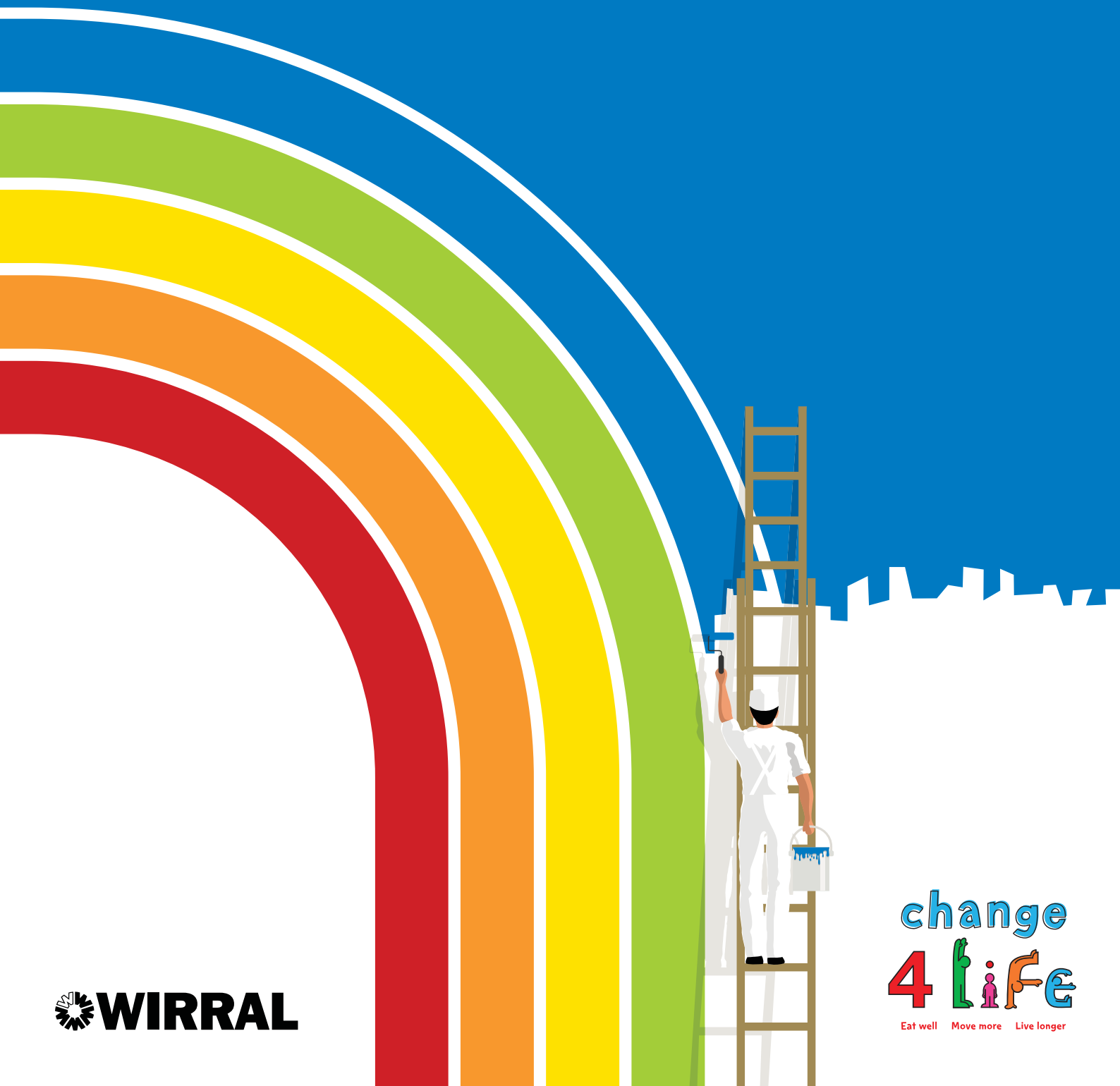


# A weight off your mind: addressing overweight and obesity in Wirral

**NHS**  
Wirral

Public Health Annual Report 2008/09



 **WIRRAL**

change  
**4** life  
Eat well Move more Live longer

# An overview by the Joint Director of Public Health

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Welcome to the Public Health Annual Report for 2008/09. This year we have taken overweight and obesity as our theme - a topic that affects many of us who struggle to maintain a healthy weight.

In recent years there has been considerable coverage in the media which has been helpful in raising awareness about the worrying trends in obesity nationally. This report focuses on the picture for Wirral both in terms of the challenges we face now and in the future if we fail to take effective action. It gives many examples of the services and activities currently in place to support individuals and families within our local communities.

The media coverage has tended to cover the extremes of morbid obesity or underweight. Rather than taking that approach, this report looks at those aspects of overweight and obesity affecting the wider population.

Maintaining a healthy weight is essentially about balancing our food intake with how much physical activity we include in our day. Modern living, with our reliance on the car, more desk-bound jobs and labour-saving devices in the home are all factors that contribute to the problem. For many of us it is about making small changes in our daily lives and the report includes personal stories about how this has made a big difference to people in Wirral. Our efforts are fortified by the Government's far-reaching Change4Life initiative - a society-wide movement that aims to prevent people from becoming overweight by encouraging them to eat better and move more.

Strategic action is also essential to support individuals in making healthy choices. Obesity is a key priority for NHS Wirral and other partner organisations through the Local Area Agreement. We have made children our main focus in order to prevent this becoming an even worse problem for the next generation, however, we also recognise that for positive changes to eating patterns and taking more exercise to be the most effective, the whole family needs to be involved.

The report shows that we have achieved a great deal in Wirral but there is clearly a very long way to go.



**Marie Armitage**

Joint Director of Public Health

# Setting the scene in Wirral

Overweight and obesity are a major concern for everyone - a lifestyle disease that has become an epidemic.

**In Wirral, one in every three adults is overweight and one in every four is obese. For children and young people the picture is equally worrying, with more than 8,000 children between the ages of 4 and 16 years already obese and only 65% classified as having a 'healthy weight.'**

Disturbing as these statistics are, national trends indicate that the picture is going to get much worse unless we act now. The Foresight Report *Tackling Obesity: Future Choices* published in 2007 estimated that by 2050, 70% of girls and 55% of boys could be overweight or obese. If something isn't done to reverse the trend, between now and 2050 nine out of every 10 adults will be overweight (*Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives: A Toolkit for Developing Local Strategies*, 2008).

A number of partners are working together to improve health and well-being and reduce inequalities. For example, whilst the NHS takes the lead on initiatives to promote breastfeeding (breastfed babies are at less risk of becoming obese than formula fed babies), Wirral Council is a key player in schemes such as the Bike It project in schools. The two are also partners in the Wirral Healthy Schools Programme, which is doing so much to promote healthy eating and the importance of physical activity.

This report highlights the achievements of this partnership working and also (on pages 26, 27 and 28 ) outlines the challenges that lie ahead in addressing poor diet and physical inactivity that are at the heart of the problem.



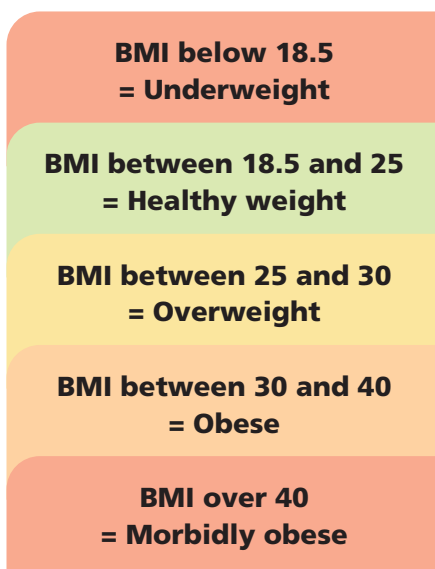
# What do we mean by overweight and obesity?

Overweight and obesity are both used to describe when a person's body weight is much more than it should be for their height (when compared with national standards).

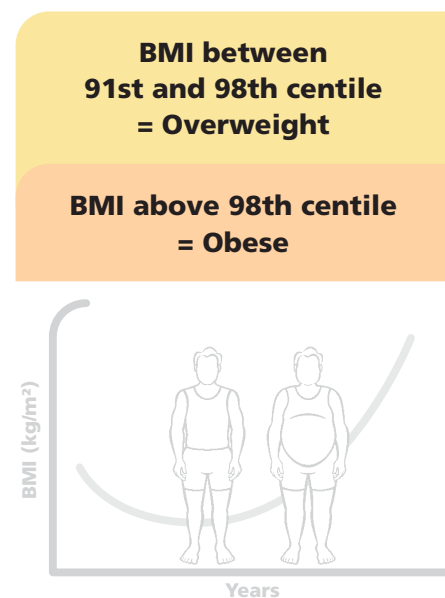
The measurement used is called the Body Mass Index (BMI). This is a ratio between height and weight, reflecting the proportion of fat to muscle and other tissues.

BMI is measured by dividing a person's weight (in kilograms) by the square of their height (in metres). The resulting figure is then compared with various thresholds that define whether a person is overweight or obese.

For adults these thresholds are:



The BMI classification for children is:

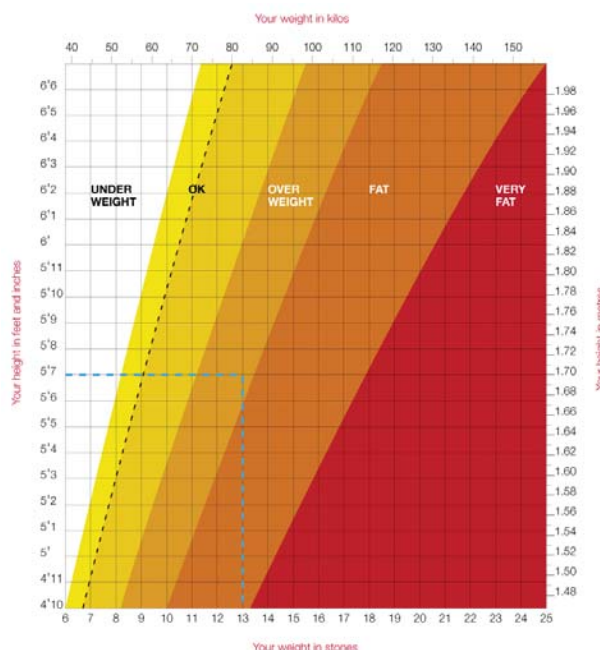


## BMI of children

The BMI estimate for children and young people should be interpreted with caution as it is not a direct measure of body fat and children are still growing. To interpret a child's BMI, their height and weight needs to be plotted on the recognised Child BMI growth chart.

For more information visit [www.harlowprinting.co.uk/paeditrics.htm](http://www.harlowprinting.co.uk/paeditrics.htm)

Adult BMI chart



# Why should we worry?

The impact of overweight and obesity has far-reaching consequences for adults, children, families, communities and society as a whole. Apart from the known health problems, anecdotal evidence collected during local weight management sessions shows the detrimental effects of overweight/obesity on mental well-being, confidence and self-esteem.

## Impact on adults



Diabetes, heart attack, stroke, some cancers

Low self-esteem and depression

Arthritis

Gallstones

Gout

Limited job opportunities

Poor quality of life

Low aspirations

## Did you know?

**Treating the health consequences of this epidemic will reach £50 billion per year by 2050 based on current trends**

Source: Foresight Tackling Obesity: Future Choices, 2007

## Impact on children and young people



# What causes so many people to be overweight and obese?

The crux of the problem is simple: we eat too much and do too little physical activity, but this is behaviour that won't be changed overnight. Our overweight society has been years in the making. We now live in a society that practically encourages us to be overweight, for the very things that were developed to make our lives 'easier' are putting our health at risk.

- Advances in technology have meant that we don't put the same amount of effort into daily life. According to the Active People's survey (2006), in Wirral fewer than 17% of women achieve the level of moderate physical activity (30 minutes x 3 times a week) and while men fare a little better, their activity levels are still below the North West and England averages
- On average British children spend five hours and 18 minutes watching television, playing computer games or being online each day (Source: *Consumer Kids*)
- Food is cheaper, more abundant and more convenient than ever before, but more often than not is laden with saturated fat, sugar and salt. A 2007 survey of Wirral schoolchildren showed that only 18% eat the recommended daily portions of five fruit and vegetables compared with 23% in England
- Portion sizes (the amount we put on our plate) have also increased so we are filling our bodies with more food but burning fewer calories (see *the eatwell plate on page 8*).



# How we are tackling the problem in Wirral

The reduction of obesity is one of the eight central themes within the Primary Care Trust's Strategic Plan (2008-2013) and significant funding has been invested in:

- Expanding the National Child Measurement Programme
- New child and family weight management services
- Healthy cookery courses for people with diabetes
- Extending work in pre-school settings
- More community sessions to promote and encourage healthy eating and physical activity

To save lives in the short term and to reduce the burden caused by overweight and obesity in the long term, we have introduced new non-NHS weight management services (in addition to the existing NHS specialist service). A new Health Challenge Wirral Programme works with individuals and families in our most disadvantaged communities to support them with changes in diet and levels of physical activity. This is explored further on page 23.

Reversing the trend in overweight and obesity requires commitment and funding from a wide range of organisations, not just the NHS. It is significant that the reduction in obesity amongst primary school age children (Reception Year) has been a key target within Wirral's Local Area Agreement since 2007. This has guaranteed a high profile across the wider Wirral partnership, the benefits of which are evident in the many examples of good practice locally.

Wirral commissions Heart of Mersey (HoM), a leading cardiovascular disease (CVD) prevention charity, to focus on national level interventions ensuring government departments work together and lobby for changes to national policy. Access to good quality and reasonably priced healthy foods is a problem for people living in deprived areas and HoM believes that these issues should be addressed at a population level to have long-term impact.

Since a third of all CVD deaths are diet-related, the potential benefits to improving diets are enormous. This is evident from the findings of the Wirral Healthier Takeaway Project (published in 2008), which highlighted the disturbingly high calorific, saturated fat and salt content of takeaway meals. For example, analysis of just one average portion of chicken korma and pilau rice showed that it contained two-and-a-half times the maximum recommended amount of saturated fat.

It is for this reason that Wirral supports HoM's Greater Merseyside Food Charter, which recognises the important contributions that food service providers can make to diet and health.

**Childhood obesity** is a priority within our commissioning strategy and is also a key target within the Local Area Agreement (LAA).



Among the organisations to have achieved the award is St James Centre in Birkenhead (see photo above). Like all successful applicants, the centre is demonstrating its commitment to provide healthier food through membership of the Charter. Its Open Door Café faces competition from nearby fast food outlets, but remains steadfast in its commitment to provide balanced healthy food for the children who attend the day nursery and a range of healthy options for members of the local community who frequent the centre.

Wirral's response to overweight and obesity has been (and continues to be) as holistic as possible, providing additional services and support to a wide variety of settings, communities and individuals. A key focus, now and in the future, is to help Wirral's children and young people to achieve and maintain a healthy weight.

An overweight child is likely to become an overweight adult, so early intervention is crucial. This approach is strongly supported by data from the National Child Measurement Programme 2007/08 (see page 15 ) which shows from measurements taken in Reception (age five) that one in ten Wirral children is obese; their health already at risk. When measured in Year 6 (at the age of 10/11), this has risen to one in five. Intervening to encourage better dietary and physical activity habits at an early stage of a child's life is an opportunity we must not and cannot miss.





## Family Matters



**More than two years after completing specialist NHS programmes to help them improve their lifestyle, Julie and Gary Reddington and their 11-year-old son Alex still pull together as a family to keep as healthy as possible.**

Gary was introduced to a local NHS gym as part of his cardiac rehabilitation following a heart attack and now attends twice weekly. Julie, who has diabetes, continues to eat healthily and take regular exercise, but it is their son, Alex, who has undergone the biggest transformation. He has gone from doing no physical activity and eating nothing but toast and milk to walking, cycling, swimming and enjoying a variety of healthy foods. The addition to the family of Lucy the dog also boosted his exercise levels. As Lucy's owner, Alex cherishes the responsibility of taking her for walks.

Alex was one of the first children to enrol on a 12-week lifestyle programme, a joint initiative with Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service. Alex was referred into the programme by a school nurse and was soon learning about portion sizes, how to identify foods that were good for him as well as preparing and cutting up fresh fruit and vegetables for small, simple meals that could be replicated at home.

**Said Julie: "He didn't do anything and he wouldn't go anywhere before the course. Now he will try different foods but say no to foods he shouldn't be eating regularly, like biscuits and cakes.**

**"Alex's main problem was his eating habits; he lived on toast and milk and wouldn't try anything else. We were encouraged to get him out of the house doing things with him, and we still do. We go on bike rides, walking and swimming and Alex is limited to the amount of television he can watch."**

The role of the family in tackling obesity should not be underestimated. The Reddingtons from Wallasey are proof that **families who want to become healthier can achieve more if they work at it together.**

For details of new services for children and families see page 16.

## Did you know?

If you visit [www.wirral.nhs.uk/healthchallengewirral](http://www.wirral.nhs.uk/healthchallengewirral) you can find out about buying fresh fruit and vegetables at a bargain price with the 'Bag a Bargain' scheme.

"We all sit down together for meals, serving the food at the table and Alex has to have at least two vegetables, even if it's only a few slices of each."

Alex is also encouraged to help prepare meals and because he's still not the biggest fan of vegetables, Julie will occasionally liquidise the carrots before adding them into the meal she's preparing.

Alex's confidence has grown tremendously, says his mum. He has been picked as a play leader in school, enjoys camping and he won an award with the Scouts recently ... for cooking.

Added Julie: "Alex's biggest achievement is being able to say 'no' to the wrong foods."

The eatwell plate was used to help Alex and his family achieve the right balance of foods in their diet.

## The eatwell plate

Use the eatwell plate to help you get the balance right. It shows how much of what you eat should come from each food group.



# First steps towards a healthy childhood

**Early intervention is key to reducing a child's risk of becoming obese.**

The national Child Health Promotion Programme stresses that the best time to review growth and development and discuss social and emotional progress with parents/carers is when their child is between 2-2½ years of age.

## Early intervention

**Today, as part of a pilot scheme within five areas of Wirral, health visitors are measuring the Body Mass Index (BMI) of young children and sharing the results with their families.**

Parents/carers of any child identified as being overweight are offered a package of care and brief interventions. Children with a BMI above the 98th centile (obese) are referred to their GP, and their parents are supported with a package of care, which would include, for example, support around healthy eating, portion sizes, mealtime routines, eating on a budget and physical activity. Following evaluation, the scheme will be rolled out across Wirral.

The updated *Child Health Promotion Programme: Pregnancy and the first five years of life* was launched in 2008. It builds on the Children's National Service Framework, putting greater emphasis on promoting the health and well-being of children in the early stages.

## Active tots

**During the last twelve months, two Early Years specialist physical activity instructors have delivered 247 Active Tots sessions, free of charge, to 1,228 children in the majority of Wirral pre-school and nursery settings, and also trained 36 members of their staff.**

These weekly one-hour sessions aim to increase children's physical activity levels and increase their carers' knowledge of physical activity, enabling them to sustain the activities when the instructors move on.

The activities are based on the Active Tots' collection of illustrated cards devised specifically for 0-5-year-olds. These provide parents, carers and professionals working in the early years' sector with a practical guide to engaging children in fun, age-appropriate interactive play.



Obese children are more likely to become obese adults. To be a healthy weight, toddlers need **a healthy diet and at least 60 minutes of physical activity a day.** NHS Wirral has worked in partnership with Wirral Council's Children and Young People's Services to deliver **Active Tots** sessions in early years' settings.

Wirral's Health Promoting Early Years Programme recognises that the early years are a critical period for developing and sustaining healthy behaviours, particularly eating habits.

**"Our setting has found participating in the programme a very positive experience. It has encouraged staff to focus upon simple steps to improve the health and well-being of children, parents and carers."**

Jacqui Woods, Manager of Manor Childcare Centre.

The resources are categorised by age range: 0-18 months; 18 months - 3 years and 3-5 years and encourage crawling, walking, jumping, balancing, throwing, catching and kicking, all of which assist the physical and social development of children under five and reinforce a positive attitude to physical activity as the child grows.

The initiative was piloted between November 2007 and May 2008 and evaluated shortly afterwards.

The key findings from the evaluation showed that:

- Parents, carers and staff found the Active Tots resources appropriate and useful
- The resource cards provided a springboard for imaginative and creative physical activity and active play with babies and young children.

The Active Tots pack has been recommended for use across Wirral.

**Organic food, fresh local produce and even a healthy eating coordinator... life for many Wirral under fives just gets better and better, thanks to the Health Promoting Early Years Programme (HPEYP).**

Fourteen more early years settings have signed up to the Programme in the last 12 months, taking the number of pre-schools and day nurseries now participating to 50.

Modelled on the National Healthy Schools Programme, which is well established in Wirral primary, secondary and special schools, HPEYP has four core themes including healthy eating and physical activity/active play. These have been developed and adapted to reflect the needs of younger children and the variety of settings they attend. For example, children learn how physical activity can help them to be healthier and how it can be part of everyday life.

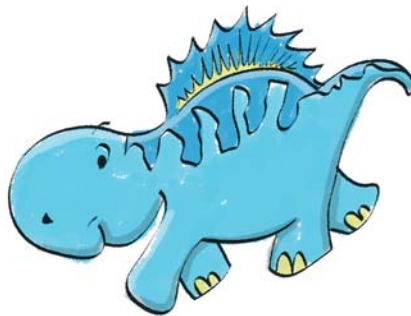
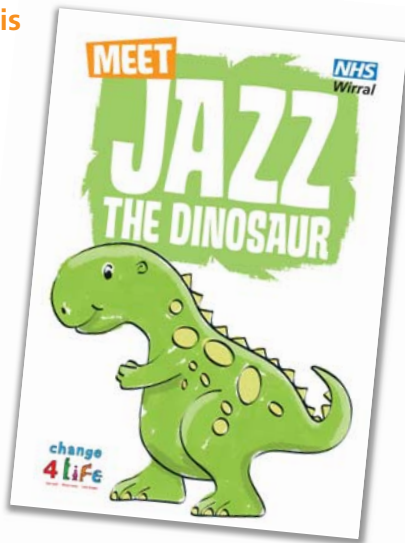
Incentives vary from personalised placemats to personal food diaries so that parents - who play an important role in sustaining health improvements - can both view and comment on their children's diet.

One of the participating nurseries, Small Steps Day Nursery in West Kirby, continues to develop its own very successful organic garden. **For the last two years, children have enjoyed planting, looking after and harvesting a wide variety of crops.** The produce is also used to make healthy soup for afternoon tea and the children can take vegetables and fruit home with them.

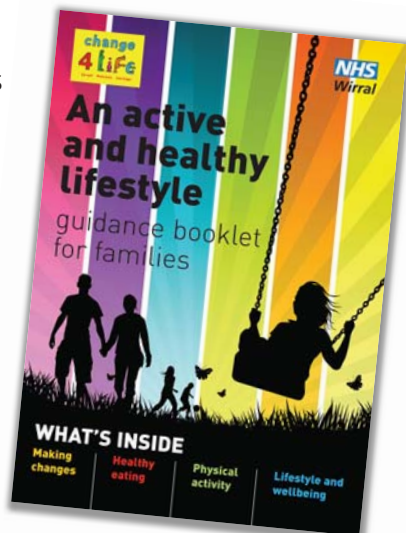
# Helping families

He is from a prehistoric age, but this cute creature is helping to tackle a modern day problem in Wirral - that of childhood obesity. Jazz the dinosaur and his friends Zest and Rainbow are the stars of a new workbook for Reception Year children (4 - 5 years). It forms part of a series of eye-catching resources commissioned by NHS Wirral.

The work is linked to the National Child Measurement Programme. This collects height and weight data for population monitoring to allow analysis of trends in growth patterns in children across England (see page 15).



The new resources for Wirral also include a step-by-step family guide entitled 'An Active and Healthy Lifestyle' which covers the essential areas of healthy eating, physical activity and mental well-being. Using a friendly, magazine style format, the guide encourages parents and carers to adopt a realistic approach to supporting children with becoming healthier by making small but sustainable changes. It also advocates working with the children to set achievable healthy goals that the family as a unit can work towards without putting parents/carers under undue pressure. One of the many benefits of this approach is that children will discover for themselves the positive and fun aspects of having a healthy lifestyle.



**Did you know?**  
Every week families on certain benefits can get free vouchers which can be swapped for milk, fresh fruit and vegetables.



Breastfeeding can help protect babies against obesity in later childhood, but the number of women who breastfeed their babies beyond a few days in Wirral is low, with marked differences across the peninsula. Of the 10 babies born in Wirral each day, only three will be breastfed (in Bidston, only 1 in 20 will be).

**The aim is to have at least 5 in 10 mothers breastfeeding by 2013.**



A campaign promoting the positive benefits of breastfeeding has gathered momentum. **Be A Star** features real-life mums in glamorous settings and is dedicated to increasing the number of young mums who choose to breastfeed.

[www.beastar.org.uk](http://www.beastar.org.uk)

## Increase breastfeeding rates to protect against obesity

Although breastfeeding is shown to be better for the health of mother and baby, breastfeeding rates in the UK are amongst the lowest in Europe, with nearly a third of women opting never to start. Wirral, for example, has not achieved the target set in the NHS Priorities and Planning Framework 2003-2006 to increase breastfeeding initiation rates by 2% a year.

Out of 23 primary care trusts in the North West (excluding Cumbria), Wirral sits in the lowest third for mothers initiating breastfeeding (as a percentage throughout 2007/08), with an initiation rate of 53.9%. This is an average figure only and does not take into account inequalities in the local area. Initiation figures in the 20% most deprived areas of Wirral are on average just 34%.

### Local action to increase rates

Many young women today have never had the opportunity to witness a mother breastfeeding and therefore breastfeeding skills and knowledge are gradually being lost from our culture. Measures to increase breastfeeding rates in Wirral include plans for a breastfeeding peer support programme.

The Be A Star campaign (highlighted left) will be going Wirral-wide in partnership with local Children's Centres. There are nine support groups to support breastfeeding mums in Wirral, with a further three planned.

Changing attitudes among Wirral's future mums is crucial. Breastfeeding awareness resources were taken into Weatherhead High School as part of the school's Health Days in July 2008 and sessions promoting the benefits of breastfeeding have been delivered to Health and Social Care students at Wirral Metropolitan College.

### Breastfeeding helps protect babies against:

- obesity in later childhood
- many infections including ear, chest, gastro-intestinal and urine infections
- childhood diabetes
- eczema and asthma

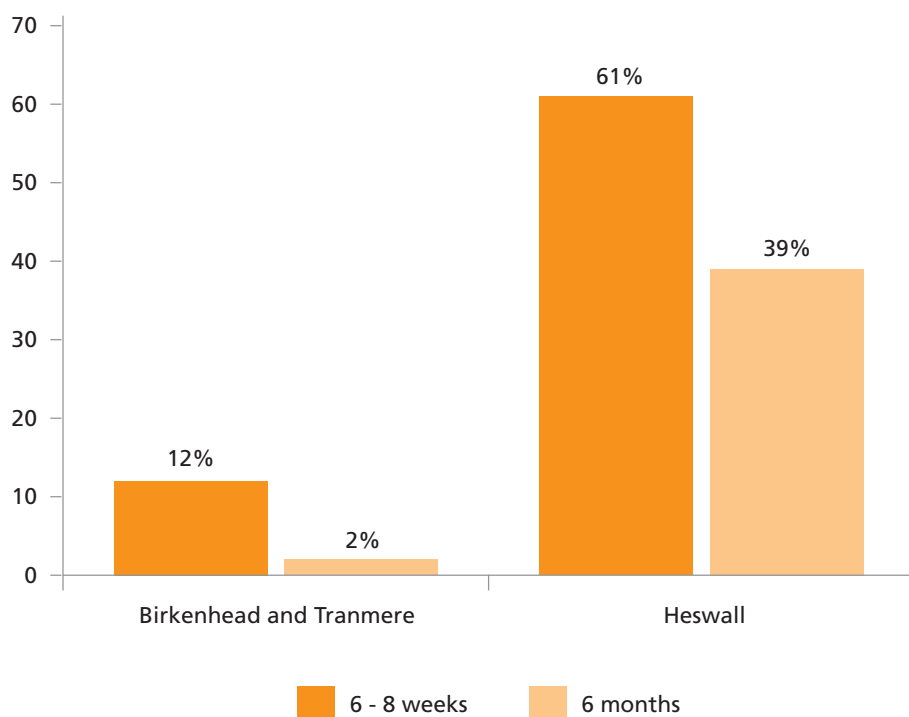
### and

- helps to protect mothers against ovarian and breast cancer and weak bones later in life
- helps mothers lose their extra baby weight quicker

Getting women to start breastfeeding shortly after giving birth is only one aspect of increasing rates to achieve improvement in health. In order to maximise the benefits to babies and mothers, the Department of Health recommends that mothers need to continue to breastfeed exclusively for the first 6 months of life.

The chart below gives an indication of how long mothers breastfeed for, comparing one of Wirral's most deprived areas to the most affluent.

### How long do women breastfeed for in Wirral?



Only 1 in 10 babies are breastfed at age 6-8 weeks in Birkenhead and Tranmere, whereas almost 1 in 3 babies are breastfed at this age in Heswall. However, even in Heswall, there is a big drop-off by the time the baby reaches the age of 6 months (from 61% at 6-8 weeks old, to only 39% at 6 months). These figures highlight the fact that there is room for improvement across Wirral, but the major focus must be to encourage and support women from our more deprived communities to breastfeed.



Sara, pictured with her 11-week-old daughter Ella, said: **“Breastfeeding gives you a real sense of pride.”** Sara is so convinced by the health benefits of breastfeeding that as a volunteer she has supported nearly 400 women in the last three years.

**Sara Atherton from Wallasey was one of a group of mums who led a campaign to promote breastfeeding in Wirral as part of National Breastfeeding Awareness Week in May 2008.**

The campaign was co-ordinated by NHS Wirral, Arrowe Park Hospital and partners in local Children's Centres, and featured extensively in the local and regional press.

# Growing into a healthy weight

**In 2008, a survey into families' attitudes and behaviours around diet and physical activity revealed that, for many, adopting a healthy lifestyle is 'hard work, stressful and unrealistic.' The survey, carried out for the Department of Health, also showed that parents:**

- Assume that as long as their children seem happy and aren't obviously unwell, they are healthy
- Are reluctant to impose control over their children's diet and activity levels, equating free choice with happiness and empowerment
- Are unaware of the risks associated with behaviours such as sedentary activity or constant snacking
- Underestimate their own importance as role models

Many different approaches are adopted in Wirral to change perceptions and attitudes.

## Did you know?

**Nearly 8,000 deaths could be prevented each year if people substituted one unhealthy snack a day with a healthier one**

Source: Heart of Mersey



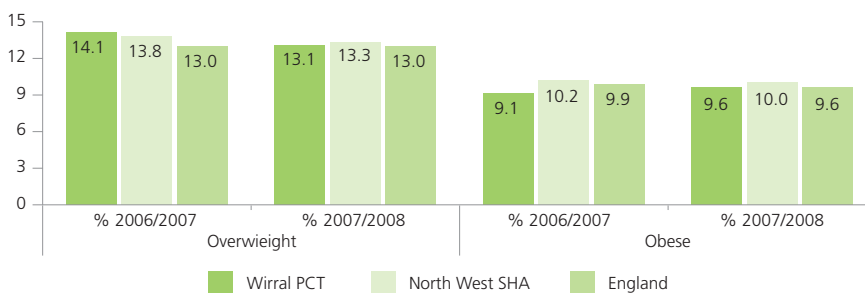


# National Child Measurement Programme

On average, Wirral has more overweight and obese children than the North West and the rest of the country, according to the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) for 2007/08. It is estimated that there are approximately 5,754 overweight and 5,781 obese 4-16 year-olds in Wirral. In addition, more children are being identified with weight problems in Year 6 than when they enter at Reception age.

The chart below shows the percentage of children in Reception Year who are overweight or obese.

- Comparing 2006/07 and 2007/08, there has been a reduction in the number of overweight children from 14.1% to 13.1%, however, the number of obese children has increased from 9.1% to 9.6%
- For 2007/08, Wirral is below the North West average for the number of overweight and obese children. However, Wirral is slightly above the England average for overweight children, and has the same average for obese children.



The Government has advised primary care trusts that by 2010/11 they must inform parents of the results of their child's measurement in a confidential letter, unless they specifically ask not to be told.

Letters will be accompanied by advice and support.

Wirral, however, encouraged by the fact that a third of all participating parents requested feedback and further support within the 2007/08 programme, will begin the process this year.

To deliver the next phase of NCMP and to provide a meaningful response to children and families:

- The School Nurse Support Team will deliver additional information and activities with the Reception Year and Year 6 schoolchildren as well as provide feedback letters to parents
- Families will be invited to a series of healthy weight workshops to discuss health issues.

The Foresight Report 2007 (Tackling Obesity: Future Choices) warned that **by 2050, 70% of girls and 55% of boys in this country could be overweight or obese.**



Wirral supports the **National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP)**, which helps to inform local planning and delivery of services for children and gather population-level surveillance data. Every year, children in Reception and Year 6 are weighed and measured.

# Weight management programmes

Several **weight management programmes** are available for Wirral adults and children whose weight is putting their health and well-being at risk.

## Change through MEND

In January 2009, NHS Wirral contracted the MEND project - Mind, Exercise, Nutrition, Do It - to deliver 21 lifestyle and weight management projects across Wirral. The programme is for 5-13-year-olds.



Sessions are held twice weekly for 10 weeks and though places are free, parents/carers are expected to accompany their child for maximum benefit. The programme encourages the whole family to help the child change eating and exercise habits whilst learning about nutrition, and introduces games to emphasise the enjoyment of physical activity. The aim is to empower families to build a foundation for healthy living. Evaluation of pilot studies showed improved self-esteem to be one of the many outcomes for participants.

The School Sport Partnerships and Sports Colleges, which have piloted two programmes to date, support the delivery of MEND. Another two programmes are underway at Clare Mount Specialist Sports College in Moreton and Park High Specialist Sports College in Birkenhead.

*"MEND is definitely the best thing since sliced (brown) bread...an absolute lifesaver. I was literally at my wits end, worrying what else I could do to improve her health and well-being."*

A parent.

Parents/carers can request a referral on **0800 230 0263**, via their GP, school nurse, practice nurse or health visitor or register online at **[www.mendprogramme.org](http://www.mendprogramme.org)**

From March 2009, children who are classified as being obese (over the 98th centile) will be referred to the Lifestyle and Weight Management Service (see page 22) via their GP or health care professional such as the school nurse, health visitor or paediatrician. Children between the 91st and 98th centile (overweight) will be referred to the MEND project.

# All Fired Up

**NHS Wirral supports a life-changing project for overweight adolescents in Wallasey. All Fired Up, which is hosted by CAS, the Confidential Advisory Service based at St. George's Medical Centre in New Brighton, encourages positive lifestyle changes leading to better weight management. The group sessions are held in Wallasey Community Fire Station, hence the name.**

Aimed at 11-16-year-olds, All Fired Up is held over 12 weekly sessions and works with parents/carers as well as the young people to introduce participants to the concept of healthy eating and physical activity. The first hour is spent in the fire station gym, using the station's cardiovascular equipment under the guidance of a qualified personal trainer. The second hour involves practical work in the fire station kitchen, led by trained tutors, with a focus on practical cookery skills and the components of a balanced diet. Four programmes a year are currently running, each with 12 students referred by their GP, practice or school nurse.



A day to remember as 'trainee firefighters' - their reward for effort and achievement.



Working out in the fire station gym.

Parents reported how the scheme has boosted their children's confidence (see one young person's comment right).

**One of the most noticeable benefits for participants is their improved self-esteem.**

**"I feel loads fitter and more healthy 'cos I'm doing more exercise and that makes me feel good."**

## Lessons in health

**Schools play a vital role in promoting good health, not only to pupils but also to the wider school community. To date, 82% of Wirral schools have achieved National Healthy Schools status, which means they have met criteria in four core themes - healthy eating and physical activity being two of them.**

To satisfy the latter, for example, schools must encourage walking and cycling to school and there must be a whole school physical activity policy. Similar programmes have been developed and implemented in Early Years and Youth Units.

Wirral Healthy Schools is part of a national initiative between the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the NHS, and co-ordinated locally by NHS Wirral. In September 2008, Wirral became one of only five Northwest Programmes to have met the Government's target for 75% of schools to have achieved healthy schools status. They accomplished this 15 months ahead of the December 2009 deadline.

Work is on-going to improve children and young people's participation in high quality PE and sport and 100% of Wirral schools are engaged in School Sport Partnerships.



Wallasey School (see above) achieved National Healthy Schools status more than two years ago and went on to attain the higher Enhanced status - the first secondary school in Wirral to do so. It means they are not only meeting the set national requirements, but they are also developing provision to address local need. For example, the school introduced 'active playgrounds' to encourage greater levels of physical activity at break-times and lunchtimes.

Did you know?  
**In Denmark, 50%  
of all children  
cycle to school**

Source: Sustrans

# Bike It



Studies show that children who exercise before going to school perform better in lessons, according to Sustrans, the country's leading sustainable transport charity which is behind the growing phenomenon of Bike It in schools.

The project contributes to schools' key agendas, including travel plans, self evaluation, health and well-being, eco and healthy and sustainable schools agendas. All participating schools commit to continue their success through a Bike It Sustainability Action Plan.

Greasby Junior School was among six Wirral schools to sign up last year. Adrian Martin, Headteacher, said: "One year ago we had children who wanted to travel to school on their bikes but were unable to due to the lack of both storage facilities and safe routes to school. Now, we have an average of forty children travelling to school on their bikes every day, with this figure rising to the nineties on high profile days such as Bike It Breakfasts and Wheelie Walkie Wednesdays. All children who were unable to ride a bike have been given the opportunity to learn."

A further six Wirral schools have signed up this year. Nationally, Bike It has already quadrupled the number of children cycling to its target schools.

[www.sustrans.org.uk/bikeit](http://www.sustrans.org.uk/bikeit)

Wirral supports **Bike It** in Merseyside through the Healthy Schools Programme. **Bike It** not only teaches children the skills they need to cycle safely and responsibly, it also raises awareness of the health benefits of cycling.

# Food and Health

Wirral Healthy Schools' team supports the wider approach to food and health. A growing number of school staff receive training in practical food education, including basic nutrition and food hygiene. As you will read on page 21, armed with this knowledge they can deliver Creative Cookery Clubs within their own schools, increasing pupils and parents' understanding of what constitutes a healthy, balanced diet.

In addition, two accredited secondary food teachers have worked with primary school staff at 20 schools to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding about food and cooking in the primary curriculum and 28 Wirral schools have signed up to the School Food Trust's Million Meals campaign, which aims to improve take-up of school meals.

Wirral Healthy Schools' team also works with catering providers to help them achieve the government's food-based and nutrient-based standards for school lunches (Wirral schools are on target to meet these standards) and has also developed a cluster support network for school staff interested in enhancing their food delivery skills. This is particularly important now that food technology lessons will be compulsory for every 11 to 14-year-old from 2011.

Some schools go that extra mile for their students - Upton Hall School for girls is one of them. As part of their new-build, the school kitchen was designed specifically with healthy cooking in mind ...plenty of grills, only one deep fat fryer and ample food preparation areas.



Teaching children about healthy eating is part of being a healthy school. Youngsters like these learn about the pleasures of healthy eating through the **Fun Food Chef's** interactive cookery sessions. [www.funfoodchef.co.uk](http://www.funfoodchef.co.uk)



In December 2008, Wallasey School welcomed the Food Standards Agency's Cooking Bus, which delivers healthy eating and food safety messages to schoolchildren in an engaging way.



# Creative Cookery Clubs

## The tasty way to teach and learn about healthy food

School staff have received training in practical food education, including diet, basic nutrition and food hygiene. Armed with this knowledge and new skills they can then go on to deliver Creative Cookery Clubs within their own school, raising awareness through fun, practical and theoretical sessions with pupils and parents about the different types of food required for a healthy, balanced diet.

Participants can also opt to attend a Level 1 Food Safety training day. On completion of the training, schools are supplied with the equipment to deliver the six-week Creative Cookery Club. The first training session was held in 2007.

Since then there have been a further four sessions, with three more courses planned for this year. Fifty-seven school staff have been trained to deliver these courses, with at least 16 more scheduled for training in 2009.

Forty-seven per cent of the participating schools are located in four of the most deprived areas (Birkenhead, Woodchurch, Tranmere and Seacombe). By June 2009, 41 primary schools, five secondary schools and eight special schools will have accessed training.

### Evaluation of the programme in 19 of the trained schools showed that:

- 285 children and 129 adults attended the courses
- The majority of clubs were run after school
- Almost as many boys as girls attended, however more female parents/carers attended than males
- 84% of the schools agreed that the courses changed the eating habits of pupils and their families
- 100% believed that the Creative Cookery Clubs have had a positive benefit for children, parents/carers.

Some schools have similar models in place already, but have gained further knowledge and skills through the Creative Cookery Club training and have used these to enhance their existing clubs.

Food in schools is rarely out of the headlines. Growing obesity levels, the drive to improve the school meal experience, new government food standards, achieving Healthy Schools Status and improving knowledge and skills in food and food preparation are all helping to keep school food on the health agenda.

**Which is why, in Wirral, Creative Cookery Clubs have been going down a treat!**



# Healthy Weight in Adulthood

**Estimated obesity prevalence across Wirral is 21.7%** (The NHS Information Centre 2003/2005). However, there are clear links between levels of obesity and areas of deprivation.

**“The course was put over really well and was very easy to take in.”**

Graham Davies  
LWMS client

**Wirral's specialist Lifestyle and Weight Management Service (LWMS) works specifically with adults who are sufficiently overweight to put their health at risk.**

The service offers a programme based on healthy eating, physical activity and behaviour change, followed by long-term support for up to 12 months to help sustain lifestyle changes. Anecdotal evidence highlights this as one of the main reasons people sustain their weight loss.

## The service offers:

- A structured healthy eating programme
- Individually tailored physical activity plan
- Advice about food labelling, portion sizes

## Plus additional support through:

- Supermarket tours
- Free lessons in healthy cookery
- On-going support for 12 months

## Additional adult weight management services

**In 2009, Wirral adults will have a wider choice of weight management services through a new arrangement with Slimming World and local pharmacies.**

The Lifestyle and Weight Management Service, located at Gibraltar House in Wallasey, will provide a co-ordinated referral point, signposting clients onto these services.

These additional services are also free and access is via referral from a designated health professional, usually a GP or practice nurse.

Representatives at the launch of the new Wirral weight management services for children and adults in March.





# Health Challenge Wirral



Sale Sharks Rugby Union prop Rob O'Donnell teamed up with members of Health Challenge Wirral in Liscard in February to spread the word about the importance of a healthy lifestyle.



**Health Challenge Wirral is part of NHS Wirral's long-term plan to tackle health inequalities across the borough.**

The programme is designed to work with people with cardiovascular disease (CVD) and mental health problems and with the long term unemployed in the target areas of Seacombe, Egremont, Poulton, Liscard, Leasowe, Moreton East, Woodchurch, North and Central Birkenhead, Bidston, Beechwood, Tranmere, Rock Ferry and Leasowe where the incidence of ill health is higher than in the 'better off' areas of Wirral.

People living in these areas are actively encouraged to request practical help and advice about changing behaviour and adopting healthier practices as part of their daily routine. They can take part in various activities in their local community (many of them free of charge) including healthy eating courses, relaxation sessions, chair-based exercise (for older people), swimming, low impact exercises, Tai Chi and a host of other activities that promote physical and positive mental health. A free lifestyle assessment is also available to help people decide on the best course of action for them.

[www.wirral.nhs.uk/healthchallengewirral](http://www.wirral.nhs.uk/healthchallengewirral)

## Weight Wise

**Weight Wise is a low impact exercise programme developed by NHS Wirral in partnership with Wirral Council to fill a growing gap in the exercise market. The classes have been offered free of charge since January 2009.**

Ideally, people with serious weight problems should aim to exercise for at least 45 minutes on five days a week. Weight Wise classes are held within local leisure facilities and offer overweight people low impact exercises for fitness and strength and cardiovascular workout.

The Wirral Lifestyle Survey 2007 identified the highest levels of obesity and lowest levels of healthy weight among those in the most disadvantaged communities. The survey findings showed that **45.8% of males and 31% of females reported themselves as being overweight.**

In 2008, NHS Wirral launched **Health Challenge Wirral** - a scheme deploying a dedicated team of health workers to engage with local communities.

## Transforming lives

Roxy Chadwick (pictured) is less than half the woman she was 15 months ago thanks to NHS Wirral. The mother of three from Birkenhead has lost an incredible **eight stone** and reduced her dress size from a 24 to a 10 - and she wants the world to know how good she feels. **"I cannot put into words just how great I feel and I'd say to anyone, no matter how big you are, just go for it because it has changed my life."**



**Fifty-four-year-old Roxy began putting on weight after having her three children, who are now grown up. At her heaviest she was 18 stone 10 pounds, but a visit to her practice nurse was to change her life.**

Suffering from depression and asthma and potentially on course for a heart attack, Roxy was referred to the Lifestyle and Weight Management Service where she joined others with similar lifestyle issues.

**"I always thought I was chubby, not fat. In actual fact I was diagnosed as morbidly obese,"** said Roxy.

After years of yo-yo dieting and slimming clubs, Roxy finally found the answer to her weight problems. Once she was on the Lifestyle and Weight

Management course, Roxy learnt about food portion sizes, the difference between good and bad fats, how to cook healthily, the benefits of exercise, the foods to avoid and the many good foods to be enjoyed.

Added Roxy: **"There's nothing complicated about it; that's the wonderful thing. You eat the sort of everyday food you have in your cupboard, but you learn about the amount of sugar in this food, how much is a healthy portion, which fats are good and which are bad. It's about being re-educated. The support I received on the course was one of the key factors for me."**



Lifestyle advisor Karen Illston is thrilled at Roxy's progress. She said: **"Roxy had given up by the time she got to me; she was like an empty shell. The difference now is amazing. It took a couple of months for Roxy to get into the course because you are learning a different way of thinking. The main thing is that Roxy has not let it slip - she's stayed focused and that's one of the hardest things to do, but it's made such a big impact on her life."**

# Free Swimming

To encourage more people to get more active, more often, Wirral Council has had a free swim programme since June 2004. In January 2009 NHS Wirral supported additional free swimming for children and families.

The response has been excellent, particularly at The Oval Wirral where there have been queues out the door! Between 17th January and 14th February this year, 3,600 free swimming sessions were recorded for children across all sites and at the end of February half-term, 24,000 free swims were recorded.

In January 2009, following extensive refurbishment, The Oval Wirral re-opened, increasing opportunities for people with weight problems to enjoy water-based activities. As well as a new warmer pool, the centre has dedicated changing rooms for people with a disability, complete with overhead tracking hoist, changing beds and hoists to assist with changing people. Installed at the poolside is a heavy-duty hoist to accommodate people of up to 30 stone.



# Walking for health

The Health Walks programme was set up jointly by Wirral Council's Ranger Service and NHS Wirral and is affiliated to the government backed initiative, Walking the way to Health.

Pauline Beecham rekindled her love of walking five years ago and this, combined with a healthier diet, helped her to shed four stone. Today, Pauline is a walk leader and takes groups of people on weekly guided health walks around Birkenhead Park, the world's first public park.

Pauline says the weight piled on after she had children; at one point she was 15 stone. **"I was so fed up because I couldn't even bend down to tie my shoelaces,"** said Pauline. Now her day isn't complete without a 40-minute circuit of the park perimeter. She added: **"Exercise and good diet go hand in hand - you can't lose weight effectively without doing both."**



# Meeting the challenge

Wirral still has much work to do and has plans to progress this with guidance from the several government reports.

However, obesity is everyone's responsibility. In the following tables we have outlined what we can all do to make a difference.

## Obesity: How we can all make a difference

### Action

#### Individual

- Aim to cut down on activities that involve little movement, such as watching TV or using the computer
- Build a little activity into your daily routine, e.g. use the stairs rather than the lift; get off the bus one stop early; walk or cycle to work where possible
- Take up an active hobby like dancing or bowling
- Eat three meals each day and reduce your portion sizes
- Eat breakfast - it's the most important meal of the day
- Have at least five portions of fruit or vegetables every day
- Avoid snacking and drinks containing sugar

#### Family

- Become more active as a family - walking, swimming, cycling, or just playing together in the park
- Avoid using food as a reward or for comfort
- Eat together whenever you can.
- Use the car less and walk more - to school / the local shops as a family
- Make sure your children have portion sizes appropriate to their size not their appetite

## Action

### Schools

- Achieve 'Healthy Schools Status' and then 'Enhanced Healthy Schools Status'
- Adopt and implement a School Travel Plan
- Have after school clubs and link in with Extended Schools
- Introduce a breakfast club
- Offer cycle training to schoolchildren and access to cycle storage facilities
- Have a 'walking' bus

### NHS

- Implement the National Child Measurement and Child Health Promotion Programmes
- Promote breastfeeding and provide support
- Provide weight management services for children, adolescents and adults
- When developing new sites, consider accessibility via walking and cycle routes
- As an employer, promote the health of staff with Travel Plans and healthy food options on site
- Provide training in brief interventions to frontline health, social care and community staff and volunteers to encourage people to manage their weight
- Expand the Walking the way to Health scheme and implement the Physical Activity Care Pathway
- Link in with the national Change4Life social marketing campaign

### Local Authority (LA)

- Support Children's Centres to achieve Health Promoting Early Years
- Promote healthier foods at sites and review vending policies at leisure centres and schools
- Use existing planning powers to manage the number and location of fast food outlets
- Set up Active Challenge walking routes with Walk England
- As an employer, promote the health of staff with Travel Plans and healthy food options on site
- Ensure planning applications, where appropriate, consider accessibility via walking and cycle routes
- Ensure adequate provision of physical activities and sport for all ages at local council facilities
- Provide cycle lanes, walking routes, traffic calming measures and Home Zones





## Action

### Voluntary / Independent

- As an employer, promote the health of staff with Travel Plans and healthy food options on site
- Link into healthy food initiatives like the Heart of Mersey Food Charter
- Work in partnership with the NHS and LA to support some of the activities listed above

### Regional NHS

- Work with the food industry to improve food labelling, reduce levels of fat, salt and sugar
- Work with Department of Transport to promote travel planning in schools, workplaces and communities
- Develop a regional approach which fosters an environment that promotes physical activity
- Maximise opportunities for joined-up action on physical activity and sport through strategic regional planning
- Disseminate and implement the North West Breastfeeding Framework
- Develop an initiative for early intervention to reinforce and embed Early Years' Foundation Stage
- Include healthy eating, physical activity, play and recreation in Positive Parenting programme and regional work programme
- Support LAs so all schools meet the government's food and nutrient-based standards for school lunches
- Develop a regional intervention programme which supports Extended Schools' contribution to tackling childhood obesity

# For more information

- If you are interested in improving your lifestyle please visit [www.wirral.nhs.uk/healthchallengewirral](http://www.wirral.nhs.uk/healthchallengewirral)
- If you are a health professional requiring more in-depth information please visit the NHS Wirral Public Health website at [www.wirral.nhs.uk/health/public\\_health](http://www.wirral.nhs.uk/health/public_health)

## Websites

### Getting Active

[www.wirral.nhs.uk/healthchallengewirral](http://www.wirral.nhs.uk/healthchallengewirral)

for details of the many free activities in Wirral

[www.wirral.gov.uk/](http://www.wirral.gov.uk/)

for details of all local leisure facilities and activities

[www.whi.org.uk](http://www.whi.org.uk)

Walking the way to Health initiative

[www.wirralcycling.org](http://www.wirralcycling.org)

for details of local bike rides

[www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk)

for free cycle maps and cycling information

[www.letstravelwise.org.uk](http://www.letstravelwise.org.uk)

for details of family bike rides

[www.wirralramblers.org.uk](http://www.wirralramblers.org.uk)

for local rambling groups.

### Healthy Weight

[www.bdaweightwise.com/](http://www.bdaweightwise.com/)

[www.nationalobesityforum.org.uk](http://www.nationalobesityforum.org.uk)

### Healthy Eating

[www.eatwell.gov.uk/](http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/)

[www.5aday.nhs.uk/](http://www.5aday.nhs.uk/)

[www.nutrition.org.uk](http://www.nutrition.org.uk)

### Heart health websites

[www.heartofmersey.org.uk](http://www.heartofmersey.org.uk)

[www.bhf.org.uk](http://www.bhf.org.uk)

### Children and Families

[www.runforthechildren.co.uk](http://www.runforthechildren.co.uk)

[www.healthystart.nhs.uk/](http://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/)

[www.walktoschool.org.uk](http://www.walktoschool.org.uk)

### Older People

[www.ageconcernwirral.org](http://www.ageconcernwirral.org)

### Young People

[www.kooth.com](http://www.kooth.com)

**We spoke to lots of people during the production of this report. If you were one of them, a big thank you!**

If you would like a copy of this report in another format such as Braille, large print, audio cassette or CD, or in another language, please call 0151 651 0011, extension 6039.

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Public Health Directorate  
NHS Wirral  
Admin Building  
St Catherine's  
Church Road  
Birkenhead  
CH42 0LQ  
Tel: 0151 651 0011  
email: [haveyoursay@wirral.nhs.uk](mailto:haveyoursay@wirral.nhs.uk)

[www.wirral.nhs.uk](http://www.wirral.nhs.uk)

