

Obesity is one of the greatest public health challenges of the 21st century. Its prevalence has tripled in many countries in the WHO European Region since the 1980s, and the numbers of those affected continue to rise at an alarming rate, particularly among children. Obesity is already responsible for 2-8% of health costs and 10-13% of deaths in different parts of the Region.

The aim of the thesis is to summarize the current knowledge on the topic breastfeeding and the preventive effect of overweight and obesity. Firstly, I focus on the etiology of overweight and obesity. Then I define overweight and obesity, and how to assess these terms by Body Mass Index (BMI) for adults, and age-and-gender specific percentile charts for children. The paper presents further the prevalence of overweight and obesity in children and adolescents, and then in relation to infant feeding. The long-term benefits of being breastfed are discussed thereafter. The role of breastfeeding in protection against obesity is then presented. Thereafter, the many general health problems related to overweight and obesity, followed by the infant feeding and the health problems related to overweight and obesity is considered. The next topic is breastfeeding and infant growth and maternal diabetes. Finally we come to the chapters on current preventive strategies from WHO and European Union, and breastfeeding promotion, protection and support according to WHO and European Union. In the conclusion I discuss the preventive effect of overweight and obesity by breastfeeding.