

What are Herefordshire Public Services doing to improve people's diet and take-up of exercise?

1 Introduction

This paper is the second of a series of discussion papers setting out Herefordshire Public Service's approach to population health issues. This paper focuses on diet and physical activity which are both key factors influencing the health of both individuals and the population as a whole.

2 Healthy diet

2.1 Healthy diet – what are the issues?

Eating a healthy diet is an important part of maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

The main elements of a health diet are:

- eating the right amount of food relative to how active a person is
- eating a balanced diet which contains foods from the major food groups and which includes:
 - lots of fruit and vegetables;
 - starchy staple foods such as wholemeal bread, potatoes and wholegrain cereals;
 - some protein-rich foods such as lean meat, fish, eggs, beans;
 - milk and dairy foods – preferably lower fat versions.

In addition, it is important for people to limit the amount of sugar, salt and fat, particularly saturated fat, in the diet and to have “five a day” (i.e. to eat at least five portions of fruit or vegetables every day).

Many of the modern-day chronic health problems that cause preventable illness and, in some cases, lead to premature death are linked, at least in part, to our diet. These include, for example, coronary heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes and dental decay. In addition, underlying conditions which influence the development of chronic health problems, such as having high blood pressure or being overweight or obese, are also linked to diet.

Improving people's diet is therefore of fundamental importance in reducing the rates of many of the major causes of ill health and premature death in the county. But the reasons why people eat unhealthily are complex and whilst people are often very aware of what they should and shouldn't eat to stay healthy, other factors often influence what they actually consume, such as the availability (or lack) of healthy choices, convenience, price and the impact of advertising. As a result, improving people's diet is not just a simple matter of providing information or educating people: a more comprehensive approach which addresses the various factors influencing diet is necessary. This is the approach adopted by Herefordshire Public Services, and is set out in the “Healthy Diet” section of the 2010/11 Herefordshire Population Health Improvement Plan.¹

¹ The 2010/11 Herefordshire Health Improvement Plan sets out existing work and proposed initiatives for the current year for improving health for nine topic areas. It is intended that this will form the basis of a 3 year Health Improvement Plan for the county.

In essence this covers a wide range of actions which aim to:

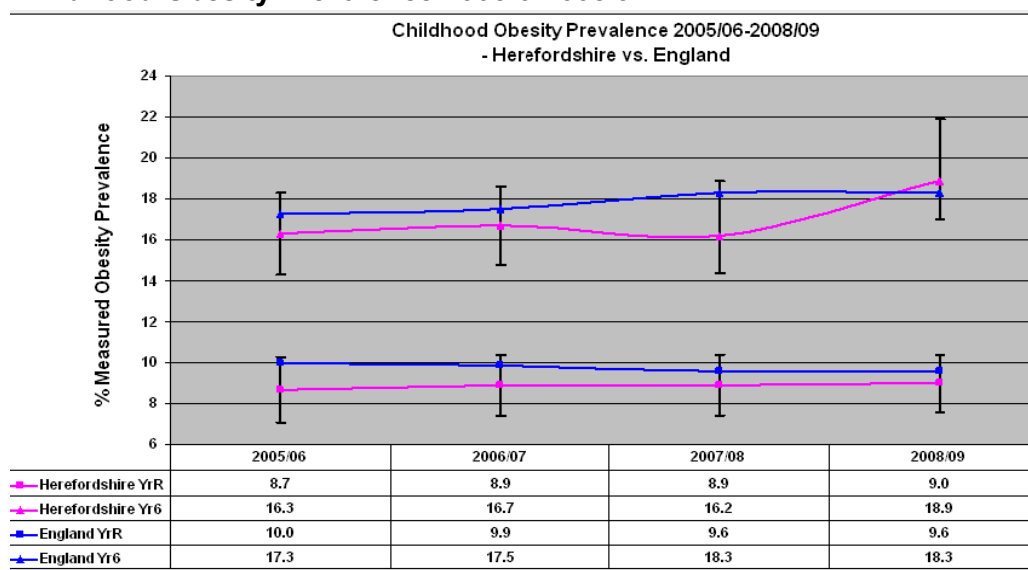
- promote a healthy diet in children and young adults;
- support overweight and obese people to reduce their weight;
- ensure that people’s surroundings and the environment in which they live and work supports healthy eating and access to healthy food (e.g. through enforcement of guidelines, policy and legislation);
- reduce inequalities in relation to diet and access to healthy food;
- improve diet and access to health food through advocacy (e.g. via policy, legislation, manufacturers);
- reduce mortality via early detection and treatment of obesity-related conditions (e.g. diabetes and coronary heart disease).

2.2 Healthy diet – current work

2.2.1 Childhood obesity

The Be Healthy Outcome Group of the Children’s Trust is the lead body for children’s health and agreed interventions to tackle childhood obesity by this group are detailed in the Health Improvement Plan. The group’s key priorities include reducing obesity in children and young people.²

Fig 1
Childhood Obesity Prevalence 2005/6-2008/9



The Children’s Trust, working with NHS Herefordshire and HALO, leads on LAA indicator NI56, which aims to achieve a reduction in obesity among primary school age children in Year 6 (age 10/11). The targets for NI56 are to reduce obesity year on year to 15.3% in 2010/11 from a baseline of 16.7%. Fig 1 shows the prevalence of obesity in reception age and year 6 children in Herefordshire and England between the years 2005/06 and 2008/09. Within Herefordshire itself, data from the

² The Be Healthy Outcome Group’s current priorities are to: promote emotional health and wellbeing and improve access to universal and targeted mental health services; promote healthy lifestyles generally and, in particular, to reduce obesity and dental health problems in children and young people; provide quality information and services to reduce substance misuse, including alcohol abuse; and provide quality information and services to improve sexual health.

West Midland Public Health Observatory suggests that South Wye has significantly higher rates of obesity compared to the regional average.

A combined approach encompassing both improving diet and increasing physical activity is adopted by a number of the initiatives in Herefordshire which aim to reduce childhood obesity. Initiatives targeted at reducing childhood obesity by promoting adequate levels of “physical activity” are discussed here and further in section 3 of this paper.

2.2.2 Some examples of current programmes which address obesity, healthy eating and/or physical activity in children

MEND (Mind, Exercise, Nutrition, Do it!)

MEND is a weight management programme for 7-13 years olds and has been running in Herefordshire since September 2008. To supplement this, a post-MEND programme has been established in partnership with Whitecross High School. The potential of post-MEND to form the basis of an ‘in house’ child weight management programme is under evaluation.

Change4Life

Change4Life is a national social marketing campaign which aims to support children, adults and families to eat more healthily and take more exercise by making small, manageable, but effective changes in their everyday lives.

A local Herefordshire Change4Life programme for children aged 2-11 years was launched locally in Herefordshire in January 2010. This programme builds on the national Change4Life model and comprises a variety of initiatives including a local social marketing campaign, a programme of events across the county run by Herefordshire’s Health Trainer Service, and a local Change4Life website. There are a number of initiatives being run in partnership with HALO, such as the 2010 summer holiday reward scheme which has encouraged children aged between 7-11 to take part in a range of different types of physical activity across the county.

Start4Life

Whilst Change4Life aims to help families eat well and move more, Start4Life focuses specifically on babies. Start4Life aims to support parents to take small, simple steps to get their baby off to a healthy start in life by providing advice on feeding and on how to get babies active. In Herefordshire, plans for the Start4Life programme include re-launching Healthy Start (expected September 2010) and rolling out the Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative.

Living Well

Living Well is a National Lottery funded programme which is targeted at children and families in South Wye and Leominster and which aims to promote healthy eating, exercise and mental wellbeing. The Living Well Herefordshire programme runs from December 2007 to November 2010. It is led by NHS Herefordshire and works with a range of third sector partners including Herefordshire Voluntary Action, Wye Woods and the CLD Youth Counselling Trust.

Healthy Schools

The Healthy Schools Team works with schools to improve the health of schoolchildren by encouraging healthy lifestyle choices through food and exercise and the Healthy Schools award scheme.

The Herefordshire Healthy Schools team helps schools to assess where they are currently and agree priorities from this discussion in an action plan. Actions may involve including health topics in teaching within the curriculum, staff development, changes to food-related policies within schools (e.g. healthy snacks, vending machines) and the development of sports activities within the school. The Healthy Schools team provide a range of support to schools, including change management support, professional development and resources for the students and staff.

Healthy Schools - school meals

Support to schools through the monitoring of school meal services and the quality of food is undertaken via collaboration between Health and Education in Herefordshire involving Herefordshire Council's Healthy Schools Partnership and Trading Standards. This provides support to schools in meeting the criteria of the National Healthy School Status.

Food safety and healthiness

Trading Standards inspects premises where food is prepared and served to children and young people to ensure that safety and nutritional standards are met. Ofsted published a protocol on environmental health and trading standards issues relating to childcare providers and children's food in April 2010. Locally, Trading Standards Officers have worked with two nurseries in relation to food standards for children and produced a report in December 2009 (available on the Council website).

School travel plans

Herefordshire Council's Sustainable Transport Team supports local school travel plans which aim to increase the number of children walking and/or cycling to school. In addition to increasing physical activity, school travel plans have the potential to cut congestion and pollution. Over 97% of Herefordshire schools have signed up to a commitment to try to reduce the number of cars coming to their school.

To continue making these interventions successful, the support of the scrutiny committee and all Members of Herefordshire Council would be welcomed. This could be through attendance at public events run through the schemes, championing local food initiatives, or supporting the implementation of travel solutions at schools within their ward.

2.2.3 Adult obesity

Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF) data is recorded at every GP practice and is the primary source of data on obesity levels among adults. In adults, obesity is defined as a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 30kg/m² or above.³

³ BMI = weight (in kilograms) divided by height (in metres) squared ie:

$$BMI = \frac{\text{weight [kg]}}{(\text{height [m]})^2}$$

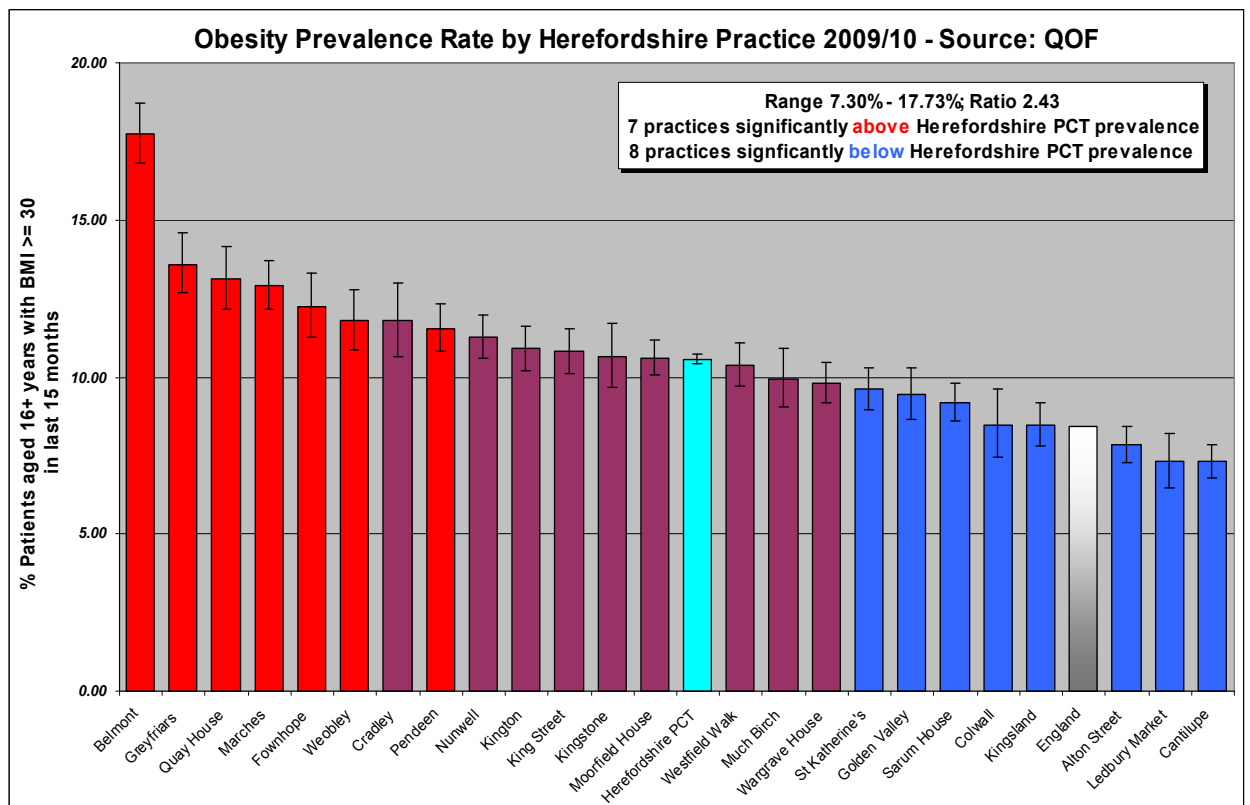
Figure 2 illustrates the wide variation in prevalence rates recorded at GP practices throughout the county – from 7.3% to 17.7%. Seven Herefordshire practices recorded rates significantly greater than the average PCT rate of 10.6% (red bars) and eight practices recorded significantly lower rates (blue bars).

Only three of the county’s practices recorded a prevalence of obesity below the national average of 8.4%. Nationally, the QOF system is not able to detect and record all cases of adult obesity and it is estimated that in Herefordshire as a whole QOF only records 43% of the expected prevalence.⁴

This means that whilst we know about 15,100 obese adults in Herefordshire, the real number of obese adults in the county is more likely to be in the regional of 35,100. Levels of obesity tend to be higher in more deprived areas and this is an example of health inequality.

These figures show that adult obesity is a real problem in the county and because of the links between obesity and many chronic and potentially life-threatening illness, also illustrates the importance of tackling adult obesity in order to prevent avoidable ill health and premature death.

Figure 2
Prevalence of obesity amongst adults in Herefordshire, by GP practice 2009/10



⁴ This is for a variety of reasons including variation between practices.

2.2.4 Some examples of current programmes which address obesity, healthy eating and/or physical activity in adults

Adult obesity is being tackled in Herefordshire through various routes including:

Herefordshire's Health Trainer Service

The Herefordshire Health Trainer Service provides free one-to-one support to people wanting to make lifestyle changes, including weight loss and exercise. Health Trainers help people to set achievable goals and to develop an individual plan to meet the goals. This service is shaped around the needs of the user and complements existing health services, for example, by providing a service that GPs can refer people to for support with weight loss, diet and exercise (people can also be referred in other ways or can refer themselves for help).

Change4Life

Change4Life, is primarily aimed at children between 2-11 years, but also supports adults and families with children by focusing on the small manageable changes they can make in their everyday lives to eat more healthily and take more exercise. The local Herefordshire Change4Life programme is discussed above in relation to childhood obesity. As the lifestyle of the whole family is key to the health-related behaviour of children, the participation of the whole family is key to the success of the Change4Life programme. Change4Life therefore also targets adults, and parents in particular, to make positive changes to their diet and their level of physical activity. Locally, this means that Health Trainers are involved in many local Change4Life events where they offer advice about healthy eating and other lifestyle choices to adults.

Obesity care pathway

An obesity care pathway is currently being developed for Herefordshire and jointly led by specialists from NHS Herefordshire and Herefordshire Hospitals Trust. This approach supports best practice in health and social care services in relation to the management and, where appropriate, onward referral of people who are overweight or obese.

Scores on the Doors

Scores on the Doors is a scheme for food premises run by Herefordshire Council Trading Standards which monitors and improves standards of hygiene and food safety in local food outlets as part of the regular inspection process. A previous national scheme, Heartbeat, looked at quality of food as well as hygiene. The potential to introduce a local scheme, similar to Heartbeat, and which is aimed at improving the healthiness of the food sold in local food outlet premises is currently being considered with one option being to do this through expanding the Scores on the Doors scheme to include a healthy eating dimension.

3 Physical activity

3.1 Physical Activity - what are the issues?

Adequate levels of physical activity help to reduce the risk of health problems and can improve wellbeing generally. The recommended amount of physical activity is at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on at least 5 days per week.

The latest data, from the 2005 Regional Lifestyle Survey 2005, shows that in Herefordshire less than half of adults (47%) take the recommended amount of exercise and that this proportion is higher for men (51%) than for women (44%) (see table 1).

Table 1 also shows how Herefordshire compares to the West Midlands region as a whole. Segmentation analysis by Sport England has identified parts of Hereford City where the uptake of moderate levels of exercise is lower than in the rest of the county.

Table 1
Percentage of adults (16 and over) undertaking 30mins of moderate physical activity at least 5 days per week in 2005

	Herefordshire	West Midlands
Men	51%	44%
Women	44%	38%
Total	47%	41%

A range of approaches are being taken to encourage local people to become more physically active. The Herefordshire Health Improvement Plan (“Physical Activity” section) outlines existing work together with a range of new and proposed initiatives. Some of the existing work in relation to increasing physical activity has been discussed above in section 2; other examples of local programmes are outlined below.

3.2 Physical activity – current work

Herefordshire Activity Network (HAN) is a partnership of organisations involved in providing sports, physical activity and leisure opportunities in the county. Members include Herefordshire Council’s Sports Development Team, Herefordshire Sport, Herefordshire School Sports Partnership, HALO, Herefordshire Voluntary Action and Herefordshire and Worcestershire Sports Partnership. HAN meets on a quarterly basis and oversees sports and leisure activities for the county. HAN coordinates sports and leisure activities for young people, contributing to the indicator on quality of life for teenagers in the county, and also ran the annual Youth Games in July 2010.

3.2.1 Herefordshire Council's Sports Development Team

Within HAN, a number of initiatives are led by Herefordshire Public Services, specifically through Herefordshire Council's Sports Development Team. The Team also manages the HALO contract for sports and leisure activities in the county.

Let's Get Moving

The Let's Get Moving scheme started this year and encourages exercises such as walking, cycling and jogging as healthy lifestyle choices. Let's Get Moving links with other initiatives being run by the Sports Development Team and a number of staff have been trained as part of the pilot programme for the scheme.

Lifestyle Improvements for Today (LIFT)

LIFT is Herefordshire's exercise referral scheme.⁵ Its aim is to provide tailored exercise programmes for those whose health would benefit from a more active lifestyle. Participants are referred into the programme by a health professional, following which they attend a consultation at one of the HALO Leisure Centres. They then undertake a programme of activity to increase their fitness levels. Sessions are held at HALO Leisure Centres and in community venues such as village halls and community centres. LIFT also provides continued exercise for people who have completed the cardiac rehabilitation programme and who need exercise for falls prevention.

Footprint Countywide

Footprints Countywide (Walking for Health) has links with LIFT and is part of the national Walking the Way to Health Initiative.⁶ The aim of this programme is to increase the number of people walking in Herefordshire by delivering a timetable of led health walks and by producing a pack of short independent walking routes. All timetabled health walks are led by a trained Volunteer Walk Leader. There are 15 walks in the county, namely Bromyard, Eardisley, Ewyas Harold, Fownhope, Kington Town, Ledbury, Leominster (Streets and Leisure), Llanwarne, Lyonshall, Marden, Ross, Weobley, Cathedral and Hinton.

Specialist physical activity scheme

Herefordshire Council's Specialist Physical Activity Scheme aims to improve the health and wellbeing of Herefordshire residents. The scheme provides targeted and specialist activity sessions, supports training through accredited health and fitness courses, provides a mentoring system for volunteers/instructors in the community, ensures integration with other lifestyle improvement programmes and works with partners to reduce barriers to participation in physical activity such as transport, lack of knowledge or lack of confidence. This scheme works in partnership with groups including Age Concern, falls prevention, cardiac rehabilitation, Adult Learning Disabilities and the Royal National College to provide delivery, training, mentoring and support.

Sport and education

Herefordshire has two School Sports Partnerships and three Sports Colleges. These aim to increase opportunities within and after school for pupils to take part in sport and physical activity, to develop links with local clubs and coaches, to work within the education arena and to provide training to develop leadership skills for pupils,

⁵ <http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/leisure/sports/6361.asp>

⁶ <http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/leisure/sports/6387.asp>

teachers and the wider community. Sports Development works in partnership with these programmes to provide advice, information and training.

Access to opportunities for physical activity

Herefordshire Council also runs a wide range of service areas which provide access to the countryside, local parks and sports and leisure activities, as well as sustainable transport and tourism. These and others like them encourage take up of physical exercise and provide widespread access to the county's population.

Within these, a few examples of specific initiatives which encourage people to exercise include:

Free cycle lessons

Herefordshire Council offers free cycling lessons to adults in a bid to encourage more cycling. One-to-one sessions, which normally cost £20, are available from professional instructors for a limited period and training is tailored to individual needs. Sessions can cover everything from guidance on choosing a suitable bike and advice on route selection to comprehensive training in all elements of on-road cycling. Training takes place on local roads and near to participants' homes or workplaces to build confidence and skills on regular journeys.

Miles without Stiles Routes

The Amey Herefordshire Public Rights of Way Section in partnership with Herefordshire Council are working to improve the rights of way network to enable easier access for all by encouraging landowners to replace stiles with gates wherever possible. Two new leaflets have been produced in partnership with the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty showing Miles without Stiles routes in Colwall and Cradley. The development of routes without stiles will enable people who might otherwise be deterred because of mobility issues to take walks.

Circular walks

In recognition of the increase in the recreational use of footpaths, certain routes have been designated as promoted circular walks. There are 15 way-marked circular walks in the county with free leaflets available from Tourist Information Centres and other local outlets.

4 Summary

This paper has summarised the health issues relating to diet and physical activity and provided examples of the wide range of work going on within Herefordshire to improve diet and uptake of physical activity at a population level. Diet and physical activity are both key factors influencing health and as such are important areas for action in order to improve population health and to contribute towards preventing cases of avoidable ill health and premature mortality amongst local people.

People who live in more deprived circumstances are likely to face additional barriers in being able to eat healthily or take the recommended amount of exercise and this in turn contributes to health inequalities (i.e. higher levels of ill health and premature death amongst people who live in deprived communities). Local plans to encourage healthy eating and physical activity take this into account in order to attempt to narrow this inequalities gap.

In order to encourage people to have a healthier diet and take more exercise, we need action at a range of levels. It is not enough just to provide information or to educate people. We also need to make sure, for example:

- that people's surroundings support good health (for example: works canteens serve healthy food; affordable fruit and vegetables are available to buy locally; safe cycle routes are in place);
- that policy is supportive (for example: school meals meet nutritional standards; school travel plans encourage physical activity);
- that producers, manufacturers and retail outlets produce healthy choices (for example: lower sugar and lower salt in processed foods; food labelling that helps people to choose healthy options);
- that people have the necessary skills as well the information they need for a healthy lifestyle (for example: cycle training, basic cooking skills).

"Healthy Diet" and "Physical Activity" form two of the nine sections in the 2010/11 Herefordshire Health Improvement Plan, which has been mentioned earlier in this paper. Each section covers the range of levels at which action is needed to make a real difference.

These levels can be summarised as:

- actions aimed at supporting children to reach adulthood with a healthy lifestyle;
- helping people who have adopted lifestyle behaviours which place them at increased risk to make positive changes to their lifestyle;
- ensuring that policy, guidance and, where appropriate, regulation and enforcement support health;
- advocacy;
- identifying and addressing inequalities;
- detecting and treating health problems at an early stage.

This Health Improvement Plan includes a combination of existing programmes plus new and proposed initiatives. In addition to providing a framework for current work, it is intended that it will also form the basis of a three year health improvement plan for the county.

The support of both Health Scrutiny Committee and all the Members of Herefordshire Council is both welcomed and needed for healthy eating and physical exercise. Councillors have an opportunity to advocate for appropriate policies, particularly around schools; to support local projects within their wards; and lobby for changes on a wider basis which will improve the health and wellbeing of the population of Herefordshire.