



Press Release

23rd may | National Day of Fight against Obesity

Obesity is also a risk factor for complications in case of coronavirus infection

Patients and health professionals fear the effect of COVID-19 on the worsening of obesity in Portugal

Lisbon, 23rd may 2020 – On this National Day of Fight against Obesity the Association of the Obese and Ex-Obese of Portugal (ADEXO), the Portuguese Society for the Study of Obesity (SPEO), Portuguese Association Against Childhood Obesity (APCOI) and the Portuguese Association of Bariatrics (APOBARI) point out that obesity is a disease that represents a risk factor for the development of complications in the context of COVID-19 infection. In addition, the three associations are concerned about the effect that the quarantine and the suspension of surgeries and appointment's may have on the worsening of the obesity situation in Portugal, since, according to a study by the Ricardo Jorge Institute released at the beginning of the year, more than half (62%) of the Portuguese are obese or pre-obese.

Regarding COVID-19, the World Obesity Federation (WOF) reveals that obesity-related illnesses appear to worsen the effect of infection with the new coronavirus. In addition, the current pandemic may contribute to an increase in obesity rates, as weight loss programs and surgical interventions have been restricted in recent weeks and restrictions are likely to continue for some time. Confinement also has an impact on mobility and can lead to forced physical inactivity which, even for short periods of time, increases the risk of metabolic disease.

Carlos Oliveira, president of ADEXO, considers that “it is essential to remember that, like COVID-19, obesity is also a public health problem in Portugal and must be treated as such. It is urgent to resume surgeries and appointment's , to take a serious look at the need for reimbursement for pharmacological

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treatment and, above all, to promote healthy lifestyle habits so that those who are already overweight do not aggravate their problem due to the pandemic”.

Paula Freitas, endocrinologist and president of SPEO reinforces this idea and underlines that “given that in Portugal the prevalence of obesity in the adult population has been increasing and since our country was one of the first to recognize obesity as a disease, SPEO would like to see obesity being treated as the serious condition it is. There is a need for earlier diagnosis and referral within the health system, betting on the promotion of better health education and the correct promotion of weight loss. There is also a need for a restructuring of existing treatment programs in our country. Health professionals in Primary Health Care must be provided with knowledge about the global treatment of obesity, but also with physical and economic means. And all these measures are particularly important in the context of the pandemic that we are experiencing today”.

The data on the impact of the pandemic on childhood obesity in Portugal are not yet available, but APCOI predictions are not very positive: confinement is estimated to have a direct impact on children's body weight that could translate into an average increase in 10%. Mário Silva, President of APCOI also states that "several scientific studies prior to the pandemic had already demonstrated an increase in weight during school vacation periods, especially among children who were already overweight and obese." According to the calculations carried out by APCOI, if each child a day has on average consumed about 200-300 extra calories (for example, through the additional consumption of some slices of cake or cookies), without having increased their daily energy expenditure through activity by the same proportion this means that in the last two months, approximately more 12,000 to 18,000 kcal will have been accumulated, which corresponds to an increase in weight of at least 2 kg”.

Marisa Oliveira, president of APOBARI, shows her concern regarding access to surgeries as they contribute to treating many cases almost definitively: “thanks to bariatric surgery we control obesity and we stop suffering from numerous comorbidities associated with the disease. We have acquired a better quality of life and are no longer at risk. That is why, even during the pandemic, it is necessary to continue to treat

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people with obesity surgically, because in addition to treating this disease, we are also decreasing the risk of complications in case of COVID-19 infection ”.

In addition to the risk of complications in case of COVID-19 infection, obesity has a huge impact on health, being associated with more than 200 other diseases, such as diabetes, dyslipidaemia, high blood pressure, sleep apnea, metabolic syndrome, cardiovascular diseases, urinary incontinence, and about 13 types of cancers, being also responsible for musculoskeletal changes, infertility, depression, decreased quality of life and increased mortality, which makes it also a great “burden” from the economic point of view, by its direct and indirect costs.

According to Carlos Oliveira of Adexo it is not obesity that is associated with cardiovascular disease, it is not obesity that is associated with diabetes, it is not obesity that is associated with respiratory diseases and sleep apnea. Is obesity what causes and accelerates all these diseases and if so, why is it not considered a disease with priority treatment?

This complex and multifactorial disease is one of the main problems of the 21st century, having already reached epidemic proportions. That is why on this National Day of Fight against Obesity ADEXO, APOBARI and APCOI ask people with obesity to strictly follow all the rules of social distance and respiratory hygiene to avoid coronavirus infection and appeal to the Ministry of Health to not put in the background the treatment and prevention of obesity.

About ADEXO:

Adexo is an association of Obese and Ex-obese Patients that was created to guarantee the rights of its members to treatments and insurance, to support them at various levels, to fight against the discrimination they are subject to and to work in the area of prevention, namely at the level of children and youth..

About SPEO:

Founded in 1989, the Portuguese Society for the Study of Obesity (SPEO), has as main objective to promote research and the dissemination of knowledge related to obesity and related aspects, within a very broad scientific community that includes researchers, doctors of various specialties, nutritionists, psychologists and physical exercise physiologists, among others and also other areas of relevance to civil society. SPEO also ensures the national representation of scientific societies and international organizations dedicated to obesity, such as the International

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Society for the Study of Obesity and the European Association for the Study of Obesity. For more information see <http://www.speo-obesidade.pt/CDA/HPhomepage.aspx>

About APOBARI:

The mission of APOBARI - Portuguese Association of Bariatrics is to disseminate bariatric surgery to society in general, following the process of patients until the time of surgery and mediating with the multidisciplinary team, both in the National Health Service and in Private Systems. Demystifying bariatric surgery is one of our major goals. The surgical solution for severe cases of obesity is and has been proven to be a "tool" to be used to combat this scourge that is morbid obesity.

About APCOI:

APCOI - Portuguese Association Against Childhood Obesity is a non-governmental, non-profit organization founded in 2010 with the mission of training children and families to fight the causes of overweight and obesity (which together affect one in three children in Portugal) through prevention projects offered free of charge to the community that have already benefited more than 500 thousand children in all regions of the country, including Madeira and the Azores.

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