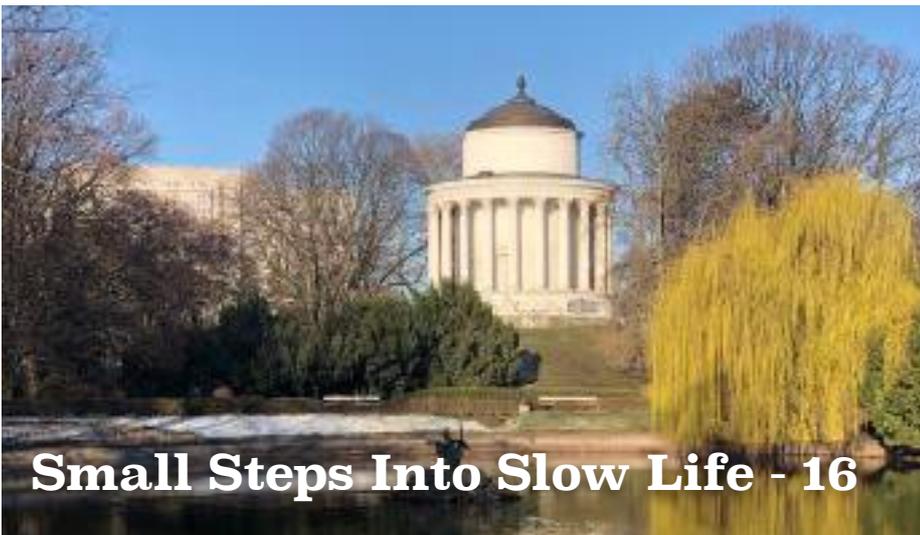




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# Healthy Mind & Body Newsletter Spring 2019



**European  
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### Healthy Mind & Body Newsletter

Third issue  
Spring 2019

**Editor:**  
Ingi Kjartansson

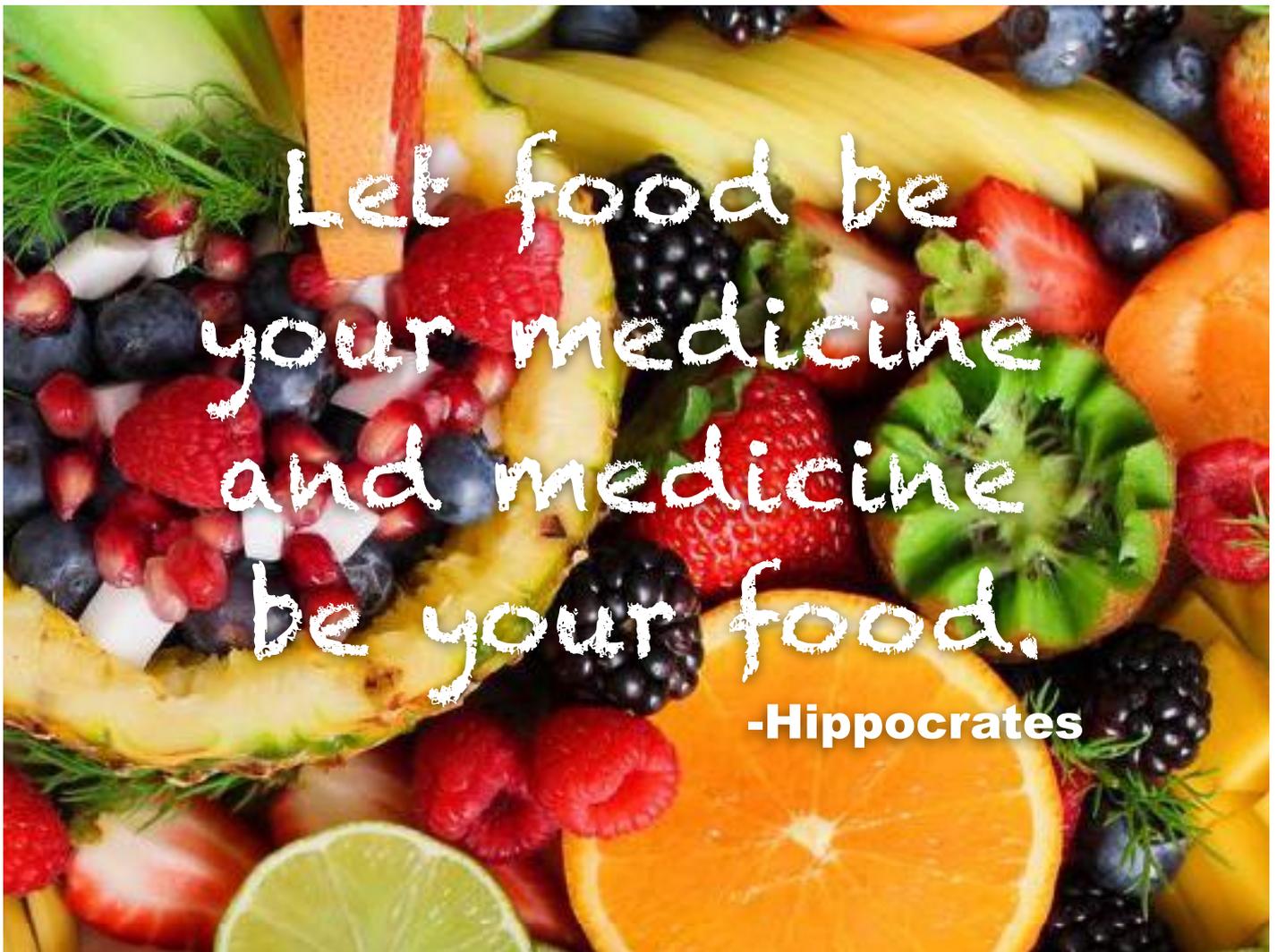
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Tropical fruit pizza  
on a watermelon  
base topped with:

- Greek yogurt
- Strawberries
- Blueberries
- Almond flakes



Let food be  
your medicine  
and medicine  
be your food.

**-Hippocrates**

## **ABOUT OBESITY**

Obesity is a complex chronic disease characterised by abnormal or excessive body fat that impairs health and/or wellbeing. 3 In this context, “abnormal” body fat refers to the accumulation of excess fat in organs and tissues as well as changes in fat cell function which can have major repercussions in other organs.

Obesity is considered a chronic disease because your body tries to “defend” its fat stores to maintain your highest weight (this is what researchers call “starvation response”). This is why when you go on a diet or begin exercising, weight loss becomes progressively more difficult and the weight will come back as soon as you stop or reduce your efforts at keeping it off.

Obesity has numerous health impacts and can affect several organ systems. Obesity can affect an individual’s psychosocial well-being. In severe cases, excess accumulation of body fat may lead to functional limitations (e.g. reduced mobility).

# Masters of Our Plate

By **Alexandra Fraiso** - Director of Communications ECPO

Food marketing rules and how to navigate around them.

**Marketing is a very specific discipline. A good marketing professional can sell anything to anybody. In food industry, this is true even more than in any other part of our life. But do we have to be victims or are there ways to chose what we truly want?**

When I first started working in marketing some 25 years ago, you couldn't watch TV ads for long before you realised that almost every second ad is presenting some food product. Of course, we are not talking about apples or pure water here. The stake is much higher: buy our newest healthiest cookie for weightloss!, eat only this and this cereal for breakfast with the only 50 % of it made of sugar!, don't miss our totally and 100 percent gluten free no-milk buttery vegetable spread! And don't forget to give to your child our beautifully colored soooo deliciously sweet bonbons fortified with a teeny tiny bit of vitamin C made in the best factory in town!

You come to the supermarket, hypermarket or any-market you make your shopping at, and from the very first step, you are bombarded by all those colorful posters and wobblers. Buy me, buy me, buy, buy, buy! And we give in.

Let's try this game for a week, shall we? Take a good look to your shopping cart in supermarket. Count all the produce without packaging. And now count all the products in colourful packets. What's winning in your cart?

Don't be so harsh on yourself. It's not your fault. It's marketing.

Let's go on with our game playing. Look around in that supermarket you go at. What do you see at your eye-level? Yes, I can say you see a lot of those colourful packets, don't you? It's not a coincidence. Most of us automatically choose the products we see at the first sight. More so, if the package is eye-catching. And let's be honest, what catches your eye more? A bag of general, no name whole-wheat flour in a general no name brown bag or a flashy bright bag of white flour fortified with all those vitamins and minerals (with a bold statement it's fortified and therefore much



The image shows a promotional sign for Howard Johnson's. The sign is white with a red roof-like top and features the text "HOWARD JOHNSON'S" in green, "Steak Sizzle Special!" in large red letters, and "only \$2.45" in red. The sign is placed on a plate of food consisting of a large charcoal broiled steak, golden-brown french fries, crisp lettuce, and tomato plus ribs and butter. Below the image, there is a caption: "Large charcoal broiled steak. Served with plenty of golden-brown french fried potatoes, crisp lettuce and tomato plus ribs and butter." At the bottom, the Howard Johnson's logo is displayed in red, with the tagline "LANDMARK FOR HUNGRY AMERICANS" underneath. A small illustration of a Howard Johnson's building is also present.

much better for you, of course) we have taken out first when making the flour white and fine? What looks better? a plain white yogurt with a plain white package, or a yogurt with fleshy colourful fruits on the cover and with added bonus of being fortified (again) with vitamins added to the chemically manufactured flavours and colours representing fruit promised?

One last try. You are presented to two packs of sardines. One tin is a bit plain looking. The other packet is not only full of colours (again) but you can see a bold note: our sardines are gluten free! Hurray! Wait a minute... What has gluten to do with sardines? The last time I checked, sardines were fish.

### **What can you do? Quite a lot!**

- Be aware of those marketing strategies: products at eye level are usually those that the shop wants to sell the most. The most expensive. And by the way, what usually costs more? Plain white yogurt or yogurt with fruity flavour fortified with this and that vitamin?
- Chose produce, not products. Real food comes often without packaging (other than natural “package” of let’s say skin on a banana).
- Go shopping with a list – and keep to it.
- If buying anything in a packet, read the list of ingredients. And put back anything with more than 5 items on the list.
- Don’t go shopping when hungry.
- Keep to the perimeter of the shop – that’s where produce is kept, usually.



- Don’t buy super-size packets if you only want one.
- Mute the television or change the channel when food advertisements come on.

Public health researchers and policy makers spend a lot of time and effort championing policies that would limit marketing of unhealthy foods, and it appears some of this work (along with consumer pressure) is having some positive effects on industry practices. Fast-food outlets offer healthier options.

Marketing aimed at children at an early age directly affects their food choices, food preferences and eating habits. This is a major concern as the majority of these products are for foods that are high in calories, fat, sugar and/or sodium.

If we can recognise that marketing is trying to trick us into buying something we don’t want or need, then that is half the battle. When you purchase your food be mindful that it is indeed your choice at that very moment in time!

# In Memory of Marina Biglia

**The European Association for The Study of Obesity (EASO) Patient Council leaders across Europe were deeply saddened by Marina Biglia's passing at the Maggiore Hospital in Novara at the end of December 2018. The EASO Patient Council has patient representatives from many countries. Some of these representatives have many more years of experience advocating for people living with obesity than others. Marina Biglia was one of these representatives. Her dedication and passion for her work inspired those representatives new and old to the Patient Council.**

Colleagues remember Marina as a warrior, with a skill for integrating art and policy. Many have expressed their condolences and shared remembrances. She focused on the patient journey as a strong advocate, always with a positive outlook. Marina was a caring parent and animal lover. She championed support for individual patients and for accepting obesity as a chronic disease on the policy level.

“The Patient Council plans to memorialise Marina and commemorate her contributions to the Council at ECO 2019 in Glasgow“, said Vicki Mooney, EASO Patient Council Secretary General. “Marina was a dear colleague and a beautiful friend, with grace, a passion for life and great concern for the well-being of others, she was loved and will be missed by many”, Vicki said.

Marina was a highly respected and recognised public figure in Vercelli

and throughout Italy. As president of the Italian National Association of Patients with Obesity, she was a prominent figure. Since 2016 she held an important role in Europe in improving access and treatment options for patients across the country.

Her public advocacy for obesity treatment provided hope to patients across Italy. She was also well known and respected among the medical community.

Dr Luca Busetto, co-chair of the EASO OMTF quotes:

*“I met Marina for the first time many years ago, when the obesity problem was still under-reported and under-estimated in our country. Marina was the first to understand how important the voice of the patient could be to increase obesity awareness in society and at the political level. She was a strong and inspiring woman. A real friend of mine*



and a friend of the Italian Obesity Society and the Italian Society for Bariatric and Metabolic Surgery.”

Some of Marina’s work included the following:

- As an active media voice, Marina Biglia was a columnist for the magazine “Donna Moderna”, published by Mondadori, and Socio SICOb (Italian Society for Obesity Surgery and Metabolic Diseases) from 2010;
- In April 2010 she published her book “Unreasonable Weight – stories of ordinary obesity“ which was distributed to over 20,000 readers;
- Between March and May 2011, Ms Biglia collaborated with the ISTUD Foundation on the O.N.I.C.E. Obesity Narrated in Italy towards an Effective Care;
- in April 2012 she published, together with Dr. Carlo Gargiulo, through the publishing house Mondadori, the book “Togliamoci il peso”;
- In May 2012 she collaborated in drafting a chapter in the volume Narrative Medicine for a Sustainable Society, published by Lupetti;

- in the summer of 2012 she collaborated with the La Bicocca University of Milan in a research project on obesity;
- since 2013 dealt with the birth and development of self-help groups (GAMA) among patients, throughout Italy;
- in 2015 she collaborated in the drafting of the new SICOb Guidelines on Obesity Surgery;
- Since 2016 Ms Biglia represented Italy on the EASO Patient Council, with a focus on access to treatment and policy.

*Marina was a woman who stood out from the crowd. Her dedication inspired other patients to want to follow in her footsteps. She will not be forgotten.*

*Rest in Peace our dear friend and colleague Marina.*

*“Like a shooting star  
flyin’ across the room.*

*So fast, so far.*

*You were gone too soon”*

## ABOUT OBESITY

Obesity needs to be diagnosed by qualified health professionals using medical assessment tools that go beyond body weight and BMI. Traditionally, body-mass index ( $BMI = \text{weight [kg]} / \text{height}^2 \text{ [m]}$ ) has been used as a surrogate measure of body fat, and thus an objective parameter to define obesity, both in epidemiological and clinical studies. The recommended BMI cut-offs should serve only as a simple screening measure, which, together with other clinical indicators, can help identify individuals who may benefit from weight-management interventions. In other words, Obesity needs to be diagnosed by qualified health professionals using medical screening and assessment tools (i.e. beyond BMI). “The overweight” category is a current BMI cut offs. If individuals are not experiencing any health impairments due to their overweight, then they may not have obesity (the disease). People come in different shapes and sizes and health can happen at a range of BMI levels. It is important for individuals to consult with their health care professionals before initiating a weight management program.

# Happy and Healthy Me!

By **Bjargey Ingólfssdóttir** - Member of ECPO

Three years ago I decided to stop dieting. That is probably not very big news for the universe but it was a very big and life changing decision for myself.

I decided to stop feeling guilty over every bite, stop starving myself and not only starve myself for good nutrition and food - but stop starving myself for love and care of myself.

What happened in the past is that I did not care of myself and I didn't think I needed anything more in life for me. I was busy thinking about everything else but myself, working, doing all the household, taking care of my kids and family. Then something happened that I didn't see coming, my health got worse, I didn't have the energy I needed to make things work in life and one day I just didn't have anything more to give. My energy was gone, I had chronic pain in my whole body, I was stressed out and anxious, I couldn't sleep and felt depressed and sad. I had lost me because I didn't take care of myself. I never allowed myself to have some time off, take time from my busy schedule as a mother of three

young children to exercise, relax or do something simply just for myself.

But what I didn't know at the time was that by not taking care of myself - I was in no condition at all to take care of everyone else.

Why did I stop dieting? Stopped counting calories, stopped stepping on the scale everyday, starving myself, eliminating sugar, skipping carbs, being in extreme exercise?

Because I realised that if I did not love myself and take care of me - nothing of the above would help me to lose weight.

I am the living proof of that no special diet or program will help you to lose weight if your mindset is not right. I have tried everything... low carb diet, Herbalife, personal training, fasting, Atkins, south beach diet, paleo, veg-an.... just name it!



And I also believed that I was a food addict and signed up for a special program for addicts. I just thought that I was an addict because I had all this extra weight.

But over the years I realised I was not an addict. I was not lazy. I didn't take care of myself. I did not care for me and I surely did not love me. It was like I had disconnected my mind from my body. I was very mean to myself. I was abusive to myself. I hated me and my body. And what happens if you hate yourself? You become sad, depressed, anxious, and unhappy. And you will definitely not lose weight.

When I thought about food I only thought about the food I couldn't have, what was bad for me, what I could not have because I was so fat. I punished myself with food and it felt terrible.

All I thought about was losing the weight and losing it fast. I thought I was a failure because I could not stay in shape. That's why I tried all those different diets.

But what happened everyday when I stepped on the scale? I was disappointed.

Disappointment, day after day, month after month, year after year. I was a failure.

One day I was looking through old photos and I found a picture of myself. In this photo I was pretty. The reason I say I was pretty is because that was what people told me at the time. I had recently lost 28 pounds after I had my first baby and people noticed and gave me compliments. They thought I looked good. But I cried when I saw that photo. I cried because my heart was so broken when this photo was taken.

I had been so mean to myself. I ran like mad on the treadmill in the gym and told myself everyday that I needed to lose weight because otherwise no one would love me. Fat was bad. I wanted to be good. Good enough for people to love me.

Ten years later that big day came in my life. The day I decided to stop dieting.

I just had enough. I thought that in the end the number on your scale doesn't matter at all if you are always unhappy and disappointed. If nothing is ever good enough.

I decided to be there for myself. Stand by me. Love me and my body unconditionally. It didn't matter to me at the time that I was almost 265 pounds. I was obese.

I decided to stop thinking about my weight and learn to love myself, just the way I was. But the thing that happened when I started to pay attention to my thoughts, my heart and soul and gave me the love and affection I needed - I realised that I didn't want to be obese and I really wanted to be healthy.

I decided to get professional help and 3 years later my body is 70 pounds lighter and my mind is free! I am happy and I love myself just the way I am. I don't need to change. The number on the scale doesn't matter. The way I feel is the only thing that matters. It is the most important thing in my life to stay healthy and be happy.

I got professional help at Heilsborg in Iceland. I signed up for a one year program that is designed for people that want a better life, better health and need help to change their lifestyle.

At Heilsborg I got help from professionals. People who understand obesity and know how to treat people living with obesity. I got help from a doctor, nurse, nutritionist, psychologist and specialists in healthy living.

I learned to eat healthy food. I learned the right way to exercise, what was good for my body and gave me energy. I stopped blaming myself for everything.

I started to listen to my body. I learned how to be healthy and happy even though I had many diseases and chronic conditions to deal with everyday.

I have fibromyalgia, endometriosis, I suffer from PTSD, chronic back pain, scoliosis, hormonal problems and a lot of other things to deal with every single day. I struggled in the program at Heilsborg but I was determined to get help and I showed up for the program every day. Sometimes I even cried in the car on the way to the gym because I felt so much pain in my body.

In Heilsborg I got the help I needed. The people in Heilsborg gave me the support I needed, they found out ways to make everything work out the right way for me.

After 6 months in this great program I had a setback. I felt like I was doing everything right, eating healthy food, exercising and just doing all the homework. I was following the program but I didn't lose weight.

I felt helpless, I felt fear, I got depressed and anxious. I thought that I would never reach my goals.

I spoke to my doctor at Heilsborg, Erla Gerdur and she told me about other options and maybe I should consider a bariatric surgery. We talked about bariatric sleeve surgery as an option for me and I decided to think about it before I would take a final decision. I wanted more time in the program, I wanted to see if I could lose more weight by myself.

After another 6 months I decided to have the surgery done and prepared myself for that. I think that making this decision was the hardest part of doing the surgery but I was ready, I wanted a better and healthier life.

And this was the best decision I could take for myself, my life and family. My life has changed and is so much better now.



To see the difference, this is a picture of me on a holiday in France in the summer of 2016. This picture also means a lot to me because it

was taken the same day I decided to have the bariatric surgery done. I was happy.



And here I am one year later on a holiday in Barcelona 2017. Feeling so much better. Happy and healthy.

Today I put myself first. I have learned that if I don't have time for my health today I might not have a good health tomorrow.

I pay attention to what I need every day to be healthy and happy. I eat good and nutritious food, I meditate and rest, I express myself by writing and doing things in life I love and which spark some joy for me. I let myself be alone if that is what I want and I also surrender myself with good people I love.

When I started to listen to my heart and do things I need to do in order to stay healthy, I started to feel so much better.

Because I feel better I want to stay healthy and I know what work I need to do to be able to do so. Now I know that dieting is never going to help me stay healthy, it's only going to cause pain and stress that will make me depressed.

I choose to be good to myself by giving me all the love and care I deserve.

I choose to be healthy and be confident in my own skin. The number on the scale is just a number, it's not the person I am.



## Eggplant sandwich.

Grill two slices of Eggplant.

Inside sandwich: Grilled Halloumi

Avocado, Chicken, Red pepper

Cottage cheese, Roasted sesame seeds

# EASO Patient Council → EASO ECPO

The EASO Patient Council was first officially formed in 2014 where approximately 10 patient representatives met at the European Congress in Sofia, Bulgaria. These patients represented countries such as Portugal, Ireland, the UK, Iceland, Italy, and Poland to name a few.

The aim of the Patient Council was to work to help the European scientific and clinical community better understand the patient experience along the care pathway.

“The EASO Patient Council was born from an idea of bringing together diverse European patient leaders to develop a pan-European advocacy community. In 2013 there were strong advocates for people living with obesity in some European countries, though people didn’t know one another and there wasn’t a wider sense of community and common cause. The Patient Council developed this sense of community, despite the linguistic and cultural challenges inherent in collaboration among patients from diverse cultures, speaking 15 different languages from 20 countries and keeping in mind that this is a patient group and some leaders have also struggled with ill health. This is a tremendous accomplishment.

As a result of the alliance, the Council has made a major mark on European and global obesity communities and has agreed to expand to include their membership groups, numbering in the tens of thousands. As the ECPO incorporates and becomes truly patient-led and managed, we see tremendous potential to impact access to treatment and care to support and improve the lives of people living with obesity”

*Sheree Bryant – EASO Secretariat*

“I was asked to speak at the ECO meeting in 2013 in Liverpool. It was a daunting prospect and I was mindful that I was the only patient representative present. The following year in

Bulgaria there were many more of us attending and the Patient Council was born. Fast forward to 2019 and ECPO is about to be launched at the ECO meeting in Glasgow. The leadership team and membership have some world class representatives. This is a tribute to all members, and to EASO who have supported us from day one I look forward to witnessing the next stage.”

*Ken Clare, UK Patient Representative, ECPO Board of Directors.*

EASO ECPO (The European Coalition for People Living with Obesity) will launch officially on April 29th at the European Congress on Obesity, Glasgow.

It has now grown to a total of 18 countries represented and 31 individual patient representatives, and more joining very soon. Out of the 10 patients who met five years ago there are 7 still involved and part of the quickly expanding organisation it has now become.

The President, Vice-president, Executive Director and Secretary steer the ship, and a Board of seven Directors guide their way.

The various national representatives serve to elevate and promote the needs and interests of our European patient community across a broad range of stakeholder communities and act as an advocacy posture for patient concerns and perspectives across Europe. The leadership council develops patient-led position statements, fosters advocacy, net-



working between and among patients, scientific groups and HCPs, delivers patient education and up-skilling via workshops through training, develops practical online educational materials, and champions European Obesity Day. The Patient Council promotes the views and needs of people with obesity, and acts as a bridge between the patient and clinical/scientific communities.

"It's an honour and a privilege to be hosting the ECPO Patient Council in Glasgow for ECO 2019, not only that, but with the exciting news that we're launching ECPO at the event on April 29th too! I'm excited to see many of the Patient Council members again and to welcome our new representatives from across Eu-

rope. I'll be introducing all the European Council members to the Scottish ECPO members, where together we can work to stamp out weight stigma and bias".

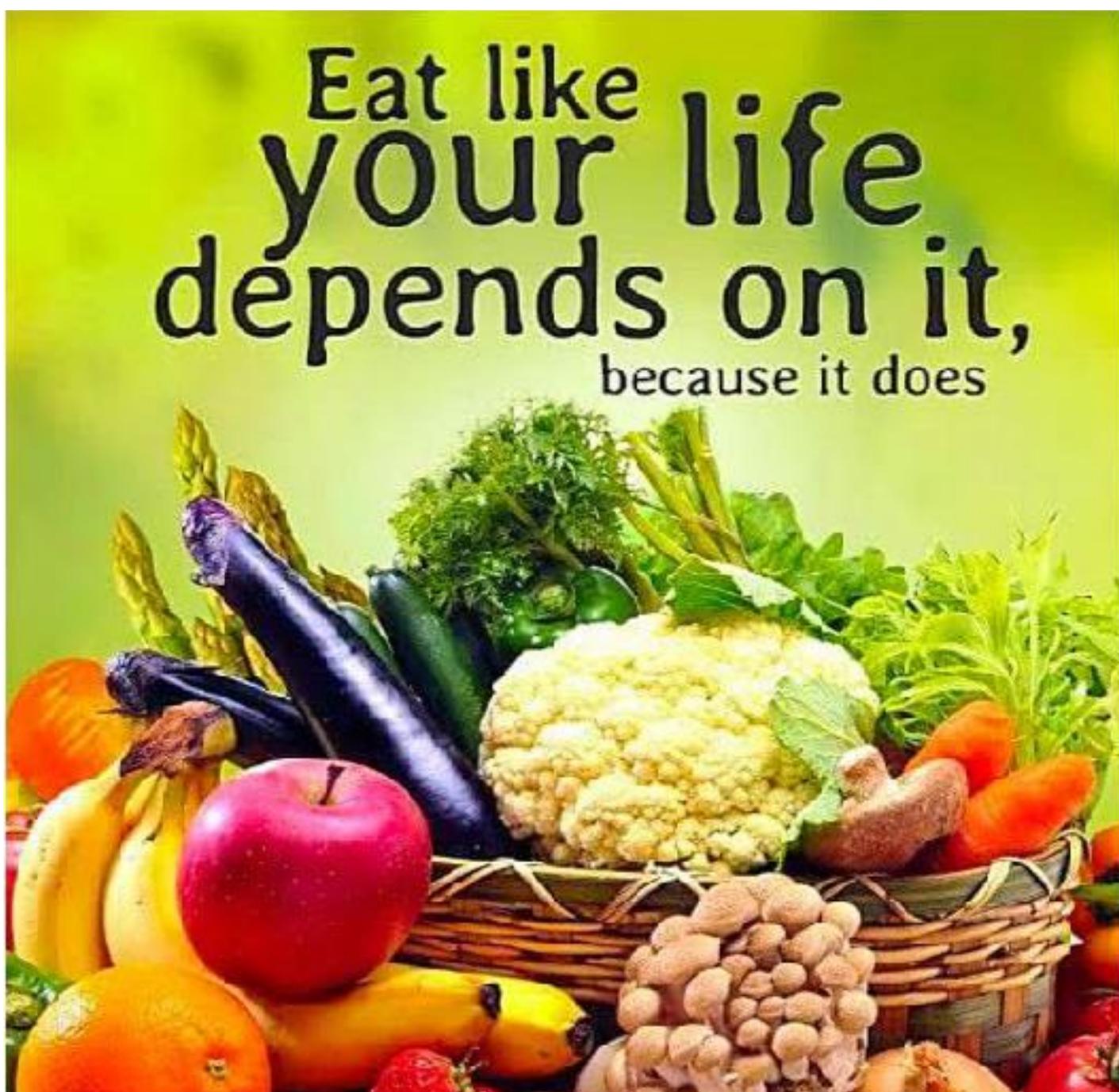
*Audrey Roberts, Scottish Patient Representative & ECPO Vice President.*

***For more information, and to receive news and follow updates you can find ECPO at:***

***ECPObesity.com***

***Facebook = ECPObesity***

***Twitter = @ECPObesity***



# European Obesity Day

By **Susie Birney** - Patient Representative ASOI/ EASO ECPO

European Obesity Day, held each year to draw attention to Europe's growing obesity.

Individuals, healthcare providers and organisations throughout Europe will be taking part in events ranging from providing free health check-ups and healthy eating advice to holding open days at hospitals and treatment centres, walks and runs to encourage exercising, and information and training workshops for healthcare professionals.

The campaign is an initiative of the European Association for the Study of Obesity (EASO), Europe's leading organisation responsible for obesity research. Since European Obesity Day (EOD) was first held in 2010, it has continued to gain awareness and support across 32 European countries. Events held over the years range from information stands, fun runs, debates and workshops for politicians and policy makers.

In 2010 EOD received an award for "campaign of the year" at the European Public Affairs Awards and in 2017 won the Best European Lobbying Campaign Award.

"Each year, European Obesity Day draws more and more supporters," says Tim Edgar, from Cambre Associates, the organisation in Brussels which runs the overall campaign. "It is particularly nice to see so many patients now involved and how they provide such valuable help and guidance to others."

In the spirit of the tagline, Tackling Obesity Together, people from all walks of life are being encouraged to participate to create greater

awareness and understanding of obesity, which is predicted to affect more than half of the European population by 2030.

According to the World Health Organization, obesity is one of the greatest public health challenges of the 21st century as its prevalence has tripled in many countries in Europe since the 1980s. In particular, EASO wants to draw attention to the impact that obesity has on society and the economy, and the huge benefits to be gained from prevention and treatment.

Among EASO's European initiatives, will be a major policy conference held in Brussels on 16th May, to which EU Member State authorities have been invited to share and prioritise best practices. It will also be attended by representatives from various European institutions and will include keynote speakers and panellists from the World Health Organization, OECD, and the European Commission.

"European and National Obesity Day is very important in each country. On this day, we can bring to the scene a serious problem



**OBESITY**  
is a **DISEASE**

that exists and that needs to have a different kind of understanding from most people and politicians in particular.

With it, in addition to allowing us to talk about OBESITY allows us to put themes linked to it and that we want to highlight annually”

This year in Portugal the theme is "Support for research is fundamental"

**Carlos Oliveira**

*Presidente da Direcção, Membro do Conselho Europeu de Pacientes*

*Presidente FENDOC Fed. Nac. Ass. Doenças Crónicas Portugal*

“European Obesity Day has already become a permanent part of the Polish calendar. This is the day when all of Poland is more loudly reminiscent how important it is to recognize obesity as a chronic disease and how important for the health of future generations is to provide access to proper treatment for those who are now ill. On the occasion of EOD 2019, OD-WAGA Foundation for People with Obesity Disease plans to show its latest greatest achievements: since EOD 2018 we have over 400 physicians with certificates of treatment of overweight and obesity (during the certification process there are another 2,000 doctors! - link: [www.certyfikacjaptbo.pl](http://www.certyfikacjaptbo.pl)) and we already have the largest website in Poland on bariatric surgery "Obesity - go under the scalpel" – since May 2018. it has been visited more than 2,000,000

times!

(link: <https://bariatria.poradnikzdrowie.pl/>). We know how important thinking and global action is, that's why both initiatives are implemented in such a way that they can be introduced in other countries in the same way”.

**Magdalena Gajda,**

*Founder and President of the OD-WAGA Foundation for People with Obesity Disease. Poland*

“We are delighted to expand our usual one-day Annual Conference to a two-day event to

**adexo**  
Associação de Doentes Obesos e Ex-obesos de Portugal  
Portuguese Association Of Obese And Formerly Obese Patients

**DIA NACIONAL E EUROPEU DA OBESIDADE**  
NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN OBESITY DAY

**APOIO À INVESTIGAÇÃO UM IMPERATIVO**  
SUPPORT FOR RESEARCH AN IMPERATIVE

**18 DE MAIO DE 2019**  
(PAVILHÃO MULTIJOSOR) ODIVELAS  
SÁBADO, DAS 10H00 ÀS 18H00

European Obesity Day 2019  
EASO PATIENT COUNCIL

lev Johnson & Johnson LUSIGLAS Novo Nordisk NOVARTIS Bayer

mark European Obesity Day in Dublin this year. It's a unique opportunity to bring together national and international experts in the area of weight stigma, build alliances, and promote best practice to reduce stigma and bias towards people living with obesity”

**Dr Cathy Breen,**

*Secretary of the Association of Studies of Obesity Ireland (ASOI)*

**Ireland**

“European Obesity Day in conjunction with the ASOI annual Conference in Dublin will focus on patient advocacy and the theme is “building bonds-bettering practice”. This day will see two patients as head line speakers, a patient co-chairing a session and seven other patients speaking throughout the day. Patients will hold a patient booth where they can be found for anyone who wants to hear their direct experiences. We are grateful to the ASOI for encouraging the patients voice to be heard.”

**Susie Birney,**

*Patient representative ASOI/ EASO ECPO*

**Ireland**

*Further details of how to support European Obesity Day and where to find more information on obesity and obesity prevention and treatment, are available on the European Obesity Day website: [www.europeanobesityday.eu](http://www.europeanobesityday.eu).*

*Activities can also be followed on Twitter (@EOD2019 and #EOD2019) and on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/EObesityD/>.*

*Details and registration for the policy conference are at: <https://www.europeanobesityday.eu/easo-annual-policy-conference/easo-policy-conference-2019/>*



## ABOUT OBESITY

We live in a fat-phobic/weight biased society and people with obesity are targets of fat shaming on a daily basis. Weight bias can have severe consequences for individuals’ physical and psychosocial health and wellbeing. A fundamental driver of weight bias is the lack of understanding of obesity. Many people believe that the amount of fat in your body is only determined by what you eat and how much you exercise. But the reality is that obesity is a complex illness caused by a number of different factors, including your environment, genes, emotional health, lack of sleep, medical problems or even some medications you may be on. Even with the same diet or the same amount of exercise, people will vary widely in the amount of body fat or weight at which their bodies settle. Obesity is a complex chronic disease and that diet and exercise are not the only solutions. Diet and exercise are just one part of the solution. Obesity needs to be treated as seriously as any other chronic disease. This means that you need to consult with their health care professional about what obesity solutions might work best for you.

# Small Steps Into a Slow Life

By **Agata Lantner**

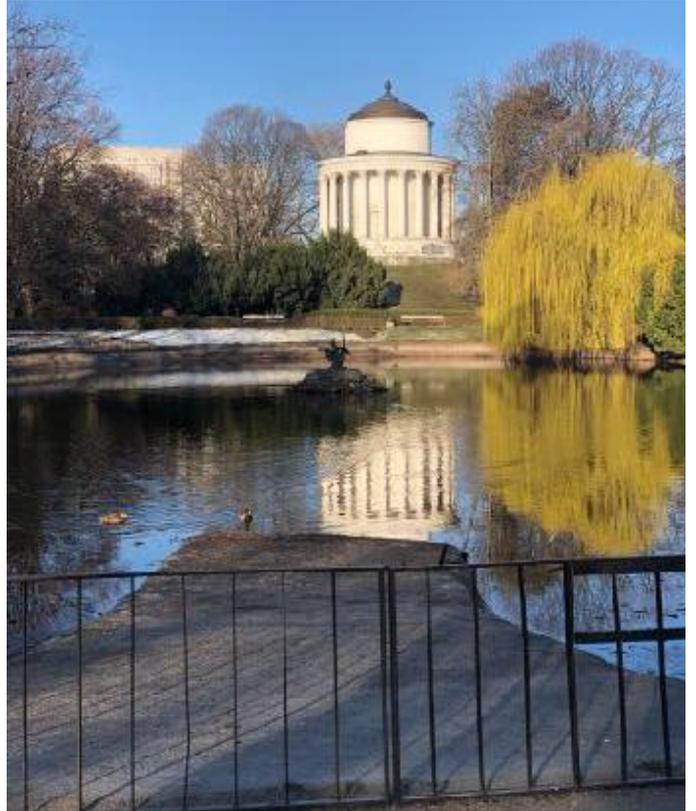
Today everything runs so fast.

Today people use fast computers and fast Internet connection to communicate as fast as possible. We drive fast cars, fly fast planes and travel on fast trains.

Today people do their best to work fast to do more and get paid better.

Today people eat fast-food or at least use a microwave or a pressure cooker to cook fast. We do not pay enough attention to taste & quality because the most important thing is not to lose time for preparing food and even for eating! We eat watching TV, at our desk at work, while surfing the net... So we often eat more than we need because we even do not notice that we have enough.

Only yesterday we were 25 y.o., today it's 45 already... yes, the life goes so fast... so we barely have time to celebrate it!



Let's SLOW DOWN. Do not stop because it is really dangerous if not even completely impossible when you are on the fast speeding world roller coaster! But why don't we take a break and slow down for a while.

We do not notice the seasons passing, we do not notice our children growing up and only one day we realise that our health has passed away so fast and our life needs changes unless we want to pass away fast as well!

Sounds terrible and not what you expected to read? Perhaps you even do not want to continue reading?

Well, good. Do not read. Instead use this time and SLOW DOWN. Close your eyes, take a deep breath. Feel your life, feel your body and feel your soul. This is you. Now and here. Slow down. Do not rush. Eat slower, talk slower, walk slower and work slower!

**Celebrate your life.**

# My Life Story

**By Willie Mates**

**My name is Willie, I am 54 years old and live on the east coast of Ireland in County Wicklow. I was overweight as a child, generally called “big-boned”. My brother also was overweight and sadly died eleven years ago at a young age of 42 years old. Over the years I have tried many different weight loss methods. Weight watchers, Slimming World, Xenical tablets, all to no avail.**

I worked on ships as Captain in the Merchant Navy. I would be gone from home for many months living at sea and travelling to many countries. Cooking wasn't in my control living on a ship. I remember one time asking the chef if he could use low fat sauces for his meals but it didn't change. It wasn't an easy environment to exercise regularly either. I then had my first fall on the ship in December 1998. I fell and broke all the bones below my waist and three bones in the sacrum of my lower back. I broke both my arms and wrists. I was in serious pain and had internal damage to my liver and kidneys. I was taking Difene as a painkiller. I had a hard recovery but with time I did heal and my bones and organs recovered well thankfully.

I returned to work in July 1999. Pain was now manageable and I would only use Difene three or four times in a month. My kidneys were monitored annually by my GP. My weight however continued to increase and I was referred in 2011 to the Weight Management Service in Dublin. With long waiting lists for a place I didn't begin my multi-disciplinary appointments until 2013. I began to do well with positive changes. I tracked my weight, I weighed my food and I began to cook without any artificial ingredients in my diet. I met a woman who I fell in love with and married a year later. Life was great, and then I had my 2nd serious fall at work in October 2015. I broke both my feet which followed with many operations. I was in serious pain and was taking Difene painkillers daily for pain relief.

I had just been for a routine kidney assessment mid-September and the results were as usual fine. After my fall my kidneys were assessed again around mid-October and I was called back in immediately. Using Difene daily

had damaged my kidneys in a short space of time and beyond repair. I began kidney dialysis immediately on the 29th of October and have been having it three times a week since.



Being on kidney dialysis has a huge impact on your life. Three days every week I travel an hour each way to the hospital and spend hours on dialysis. My weight fluctuates with fluid retention. If I want to go on holidays or even away for a couple of days, I can only go if there is a hospital available and equipped for me to have dialysis there. It must be arranged at least 6 weeks in advance and the days available may be limited and can dictate how your holiday will actually be planned out.

There are different types of dialysis but for most patients we need to limit the amount of sodium, potassium and phosphorous in our diet. Learning exactly what ingredients are in every meal I eat is a necessity. It took a while to adjust to being on dialysis and how it affected my life and relationships.

I was told I would not be eligible for a kidney transplant until I weighed 90-95 kgs. At my heaviest I was 187 kgs and had lost some weight during my time at the weight management service but was not anywhere near this target. With waiting lists so long in the public health system I approached my health insurer. Up until a few years ago bariatric surgery was not covered by any health insurer but at this point in time it was and I had my hopes up to have surgery as soon as possible. But I was soon told the devastating news that there was no hospital that had both the equipment and bed suitable for both bariatric surgery and kidney dialysis to have my surgery privately. The only hospital equipped was the one where I was on the waiting list for.

I was in a wheelchair and unable to exercise.

I was at least a couple of years away from reaching the top of the list, with only 30 surgeries performed a year.

I couldn't get a kidney transplant until I lost weight.

I was on a very specific strict diet for my kidneys which now ruled out some of my favourite healthy foods like tomatoes.

I had to wait.

I finally had bariatric surgery in June 2018. And as of today weigh 119kgs. My kidney specialist is now arguing the case that I have lost a substantial amount of weight and should be approved for my kidney transplant.



Why am I sharing my story? Because I was never fully warned of the danger of taking Difene to my kidneys. I was told that long term use could cause problems with my stomach and cause ulcers, which they did. But I never knew the full extent of the damage and that I would end up on dialysis. Please check, and double check, any medication you need to take on a regular basis! Don't assume your GP will inform you of everything you need to know.

People assume somebody carrying weight does not stick to diets, won't exercise, is not compliant with the advice from their team. This is not always the case and bariatric surgery has been the tool and help I needed to help with the efforts I already had been making in recent years to lose weight. More patients need to share their own personal experiences to help people understand that obesity is a complex disease that nobody chooses to suffer with because they just don't try hard enough. Everybody arrives where they are often due to circumstances beyond their control and by sharing our stories maybe people will not be so quick to judge.

How to create healthy habits  
without restrictions

