

# 'Weight control, Alcohol reduction, Smoking cessation, Health promotion, Exercise and Diet (WASHED)': A mnemonic for lifestyle modification in obesity

Sir,

There is an increase in noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) globally. In 2008, 36 million out of 57 million deaths in the world were attributable to NCDs, majority of these were in low- and middle-income countries.<sup>[1]</sup> There is projected to be an increase in NCD deaths by 15% between the period of 2010–2020.<sup>[1]</sup> The magnitude and the burden of NCDs in developing countries are also rising, and the implications have far reaching consequences. A report from The Gambia, stated a rise in morbidity, hospitalization, and mortality following NCDs.<sup>[2]</sup>

The most common NCDs worldwide are cardiovascular diseases, cancers, chronic respiratory diseases, and diabetes mellitus.<sup>[3]</sup> Prevalence of NCDs has been reported to be significantly associated with risk factors such as obesity, excessive alcohol intake, smoking habits, positive family history, physical inactivity, and unhealthy diet.<sup>[4]</sup> In a study among Nigerians, the prevalence of NCDs was found to be 32.8% with obesity having the highest disease-specific prevalence of 25%, hypertension with 14.4%, and diabetes mellitus being 12.7%.<sup>[4]</sup> Ogah *et al.* in 2013, reported the prevalence of systolic and diastolic hypertension as being 31.8% and that of obesity as 13.8%.<sup>[5]</sup> The prevalence of hypertension was also found to be 21.33% in another Nigerian study.<sup>[6]</sup>

In counseling, patients with NCDs, lifestyle modification is a very vital tool for health workers to employ. To improve teaching methods about lifestyle modification for NCDs at both the undergraduate and postgraduate level, a mnemonic, weight control, alcohol reduction, smoking cessation, health promotion, exercise, and diet (WASHED), is offered for the aspects of lifestyle modification which need to be at one's fingertips.<sup>[7]</sup> There is also a need to emphasize the prevention and management of obesity being an emerging NCD through lifestyle modification.<sup>[8]</sup>

Lifestyle modification involves several processes many of which are intertwined and even overlap. These processes of lifestyle modification include weight control which relies on an adequate diet and physical exercise as well as health promotion which comprises physical exercise, dietary education, and advice on smoking.<sup>[9]</sup> For weight control, the target for the obese individual is weight reduction by about 10% of their initial body weight.<sup>[10]</sup> Alcohol consumption in terms of quantity and type must be enquired about, and the individual counseled appropriately to reduce alcohol intake. In addition to this, alcohol control policies must be put in place.<sup>[11]</sup> Smoking cessation should also be encouraged.<sup>[9]</sup>

Health promotion involves processes in which patients attain healthier lifestyle behavior to prevent illness and disability.<sup>[12]</sup> This is done through patient education which is a vital part of every medical interaction and includes the teaching and learning that takes place between the healthcare provider and the patient.<sup>[12]</sup> Educating patients increases adherence, ensures patients are satisfied, reduces office visits and cost. Patient education also lowers morbidity and mortality, improves quality-of-life and empowers patients.<sup>[12]</sup> Exercise involves encouraging physical activity for about 30 min 5 times a week. In a week, this cumulates to about 150 min of moderate intensity activity.<sup>[13]</sup> Diet comprised of advice on adding whole-grain foods into their meals, eating fat-free or low-dairy products, taking lean protein, daily fruit and vegetable consumption, and reducing trans fats, cholesterol, sugars, and salt.<sup>[9]</sup>

## Conclusion

This mnemonic would be helpful in the management of obesity and several other NCDs such as hypertension and diabetes mellitus. Lifestyle modification using the mnemonic WASHED is an appropriate means of counseling patients with NCDs and is also useful for teaching both medical students and resident doctors. Medical education and training should be done using such mnemonics as the one suggested by this article.

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