

Pizza, Pasta, Potatoes, Protein — How Italian Children Became So Overweight

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ANNOTATED READING • DIFFICULT WORDS WITH URDU MEANING + ENGLISH SYNONYMS •
SCHOLAR EYE STUDY EDITION

How to read this edition: every **difficult word** is followed by (اردو معنی: synonym 1, synonym 2, synonym 3) right where it appears in the sentence, so you can keep reading without losing the flow of the story.

Daily life is not easy for Salvatore. At 17, he weighs 170kg (26st 10lb) and **struggles** (جدوجہد کرنا: strive, grapple, labour) to walk.

He can't tie his own shoelaces and his Vespa scooter **strains** (دباؤ ڈالنا: labours, strives, groans) to bear his weight – in one week, its wheels broke seven times.

"He eats **constantly** (مستطیل: continuously, incessantly, ceaselessly)," says his mother Anna.

Salvatore is among a growing number of Italian children and teenagers living with **obesity** (موٹاپا: corpulence, fatness, overweight condition). The problem is particularly **acute** (شدید: severe, intense, extreme) in the south: in parts of the Campania region, more than 40% of eight and nine-year-olds are **overweight** (زائد الوزن: heavy, plump, obese). The town of Ponticelli, on the **outskirts** (نواحی علاقہ: suburbs, periphery, environs) of Naples, has earned the **unenviable**

(ناقابلِ رشک: undesirable, unfortunate, unwelcome) reputation as one of the world's child obesity capitals.

It is a **striking** (نمایاں: remarkable, notable, conspicuous) development in a country long **regarded** (خیال کیا جاتا: considered, viewed, deemed) as the spiritual home of the Mediterranean diet. Yet today, Italian children are among the most overweight in Europe, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

Salvatore is waiting for life-changing surgery at the Betania Hospital in Ponticelli, where Dr Sonja Chiappetta has spent 15 years treating patients with **severe** (شدید: serious, intense, grave) obesity.

Until recently, she says, most of her patients were in their fifties. "Now I see those same patients when they're teenagers, as young as 16. They are getting younger, and it's **frightening** (خوفناک: alarming, terrifying, disturbing)."

The surgery she carries out removes up to 90% of the stomach – meaning people are unable to eat large **quantities** (مقدار: amounts, volumes, portions) of food. Demand has risen **sharply** (تیزی سے: steeply, rapidly, dramatically) in this part of Italy.

But Salvatore has been told he cannot get the operation. His weight is so **excessive** (ضرورت سے زیادہ: extreme, exorbitant, immoderate) it makes the surgery too dangerous.

Instead, Dr Chiappetta has **prescribed** (تجویز کردہ: recommended, advised, directed) him a GLP-1 weight-loss injection to reduce his **appetite** (بھوک: hunger, craving, desire for food) and help him lose enough weight for the operation.

A Diet That Once Made the Country Famous

For decades, Italy was **held up as** (بطور مثال پیش کیا گیا: presented, showcased, portrayed) a model of healthy eating.

The Mediterranean diet – rich in vegetables, **legumes** (پھلیاں: pulses, beans, lentils), olive oil, whole grains and fish – became famous after US **physiologist** (ماہرِ افعالیات: scientist, researcher, physiological expert) Ancel Keys and his wife, biochemist Margaret Keys, studied

communities in southern Italy in the 1950s and linked their habits to **remarkably** (نمایاں: notably, strikingly, exceptionally) low rates of heart disease.

Their research **transformed** (تبدیل کر دیا: changed, converted, revolutionized) a regional way of eating into one of the world's best-known diets; a **blueprint** (خاکہ: model, template, plan) for healthy living.

But the Italy that inspired those studies no longer exists.

"The traditional Mediterranean diet has been lost," says Doctor Valter Longo, director of the **Longevity** (طویل عمری: long life, durability, lasting quality) Institute at the University of Southern California. "Only 10% of Italians really follow it."

Dr Longo **sums up** (خلاصہ کرتا ہے: summarizes, encapsulates, condenses) the modern Italian diet with what he calls the "five Ps": pizza, pasta, potatoes, protein and pane – the Italian word for bread.

The transformation is visible everywhere: from supermarket shelves **stocked** (بھرا ہوا: filled, loaded, stacked) with **ultra-processed** (انتہائی مصنوعی طور پر تیار کردہ: heavily refined, industrially made, artificial) foods to pizzerias selling slices **piled** (ڈھیر لگا ہوا: heaped, stacked, mounded) high with chips, sausages and fried snacks.

"They Don't Realise Their Child's Weight Is What's Causing It"

Doctor Roberto Berni Canani, a **paediatrician** (اطفال کا ڈاکٹر: child specialist, pediatric doctor, children's physician) and obesity specialist at the Federico II University in Naples, sees the **consequences** (نتائج: results, outcomes, effects) every day.

"I've treated children who are just two or three years old and already weigh 25kg," he says.

He says most parents don't **recognise** (پہچاننا: acknowledge, identify, realize) their children are overweight.

"They come to see me because of other problems – a cough, stomach pain, **diarrhoea** (اسہال: loose motions, upset stomach, dysentery-like condition). They don't realise their child's weight is what's causing it."

Ten-year-old Francesca has a **persistent** (مسلسل: continuous, lingering, chronic) cough and struggles to **swallow** (نگلنا: gulp, ingest, consume). Doctors suspect an **inflammatory** (سوزش والی: irritating, inflaming, aggravating) condition of the **oesophagus** (خوراک کی نالی: gullet, food pipe, esophagus).

She weighs 60kg (9st 6lb) – but that's not why her parents have **sought** (طلب کیا: requested, pursued, looked for) medical help.

Francesca says she eats bread with Nutella for breakfast, a chocolate-filled sponge cake as a snack, pasta with **lentils** (مسور کی دال: pulses, legumes, dal) for lunch and usually chicken for dinner.

"But she doesn't eat vegetables," her mother, Carmen, **interjects** (درمیان میں بولتی ہے: interrupts, cuts in, breaks in). "I put them in front of her, but she won't touch them."

Francesca's parents **insist** (اصرار کرتے ہیں: assert, maintain, claim) she is active. She does artistic **gymnastics** (ورزشی کھیل: acrobatics, athletics, calisthenics) and Latin dance, and doesn't get tired. They have never considered her weight as a problem.

Dr Berni Canani reaches a different **conclusion** (نتیجہ: verdict, judgment, deduction).

The problem, he explains, is the overall **pattern** (طرز عمل: habit, routine, tendency) rather than any single meal. Small, **calorie-dense** (زیادہ حرارے والی: energy-rich, high-calorie, fattening) foods consumed throughout the day, sugary drinks, too few fruit and vegetables and little understanding of how these habits **accumulate** (جمع ہوتی ہیں: build up, amass, pile up) over time.

"This is a very good mother," he says. "A very good father. They simply don't recognise the importance of diet quality and body weight."

By the time many families arrive at his clinic, unhealthy habits have already become **deeply ingrained** (گہرائی سے پیوستہ: embedded, entrenched, rooted). They begin at home and are **reinforced** (تقویت دی جاتی ہے: strengthened, bolstered, reaffirmed) at school.

And in Italy, **encouraging** (حوصلہ افزائی کرنا: motivating, urging, inspiring) children to be more active can be surprisingly difficult.

Many schools are housed in beautiful old **palazzi** (محلات: palaces, mansions, grand buildings) – they were never designed with modern physical education in mind.

The Ugo Foscolo primary school is no exception. Its gym has **barely** (بمشکل: hardly, scarcely, just about) enough space for a class of children to move around.

"I have one pupil I'm particularly **concerned** (فکرمند: worried, anxious, troubled) about," says Francesca Pecce, who teaches at the school. "He's 10 years old and weighs around 60 kilograms."

She has tried raising the issue with his mother.

"But she is not worried," Pecce says. "In Neapolitan culture, if a child is a little **chubby** (گول: plump, pudgy, round) with **rosy** (سرخ مائل: pink, ruddy, blushing) cheeks, people often think they're healthy."

Schools, she believes, can help change that, especially if children "take home" lessons about healthy eating.

"Sometimes it's easier to **educate** (تعلیم دینا: instruct, teach, inform) the parents through their children than the other way round."

Trying to Turn the Tide

At a secondary school in Naples, students **file into** (قطار میں داخل ہوتے ہیں: enter in a line, march in, troop in) a classroom for a **nutrition** (غذائیت: diet, nourishment, food science) workshop run by the Valter Longo Foundation.

The programme is part of a regional **initiative** (اقدام: scheme, program, plan) to **tackle** (نمٹنا: address, combat, confront) childhood obesity. Over the coming months, more than 17,000

students across 25 schools will take part. Families will receive support to help change eating habits at home.

But not all of the students are **convinced** (قائل: persuaded, satisfied, assured).

Eighteen-year-old **Ciro doubts** (شک کرتا ہے: questions, disbelieves, is skeptical of) that information alone will change behaviour.

"My classmates already know what's healthy," he says. "They just don't care."

Carmen, 19, is more **optimistic** (پرامید: hopeful, positive, confident).

"I thought it was actually really helpful because teenagers today are really big into junk food, and don't exercise as much."

She says the problem is that **temptation** (لالچ: enticement, allure, attraction) is everywhere. Even foods traditionally **associated** (منسلک: connected, linked, related) with Italy have changed.

"When we go out for pizza, people don't just order a Margherita. They put chips, sausages and fried food on top."

Add to that the centuries-old **cliches** (فرسودہ خیالات: stereotypes, platitudes, truisms) of Italian mothers and grandmothers showing their love through food, and it's a **perfect storm** (بدترین صورتحال کا مجموعہ: critical combination, worst-case convergence, disastrous mix).

A Chronic Disease, By Law

Obesity is an "**escalating** (بڑھتا ہوا: increasing, intensifying, mounting) global **epidemic** (وبا: outbreak, plague, widespread occurrence)", says the WHO. More than one billion people worldwide are now obese, and childhood obesity has **quadrupled** (چار گنا ہو گیا: multiplied fourfold, increased four times, risen four times over) since 1990.

In 2025, Italy became the first country to pass a national law recognising obesity as a **chronic** (دائمی: persistent, long-lasting, continual), **progressive** (بڑھتی ہوئی: advancing, worsening, developing) and **relapsing** (دوبارہ لوٹنے والی: recurring, returning, backsliding) disease.

Rather than treating obesity simply as the result of poor choices, the country's new law recognises it as a chronic disease influenced by biology, environment and social **circumstances** (حالات: conditions, situations, factors).

The Campania region has become a **testing ground** (تجرباتی میدان: proving ground, trial site, experimental base) for putting that philosophy into practice, implementing a series of **ambitious** (پر عزم: bold, aspiring, high-reaching) **interventions** (مداخلات: measures, actions, steps) – including a **controversial** (متنازعہ: disputed, contentious, debatable) trial of a "fast-mimicking diet".

Researchers are **recruiting** (بھرتی کر رہے ہیں: enlisting, enrolling, signing up) 300 overweight **adolescents** (نوعمر افراد: teenagers, youths, juveniles) who will spend five days every three months on a controlled diet of 1,100 calories on day one and 770 calories on following four days – so **restrictive** (پابندی والی: limiting, constraining, strict) it resembles a fast.

The goal is to **trigger** (متحرک کرنا: initiate, spark, set off) a "metabolic reset".

"Fasting, or controlled **deprivation** (محرومی: denial, lack, withholding) of food, is linked to a longer and healthier lifespan," says Dr Longo, who has spent three decades studying the effects of fasting.

But not all obesity specialists are **persuaded** (قائل: convinced, satisfied, assured) that fasting is the right approach for children.

Paediatrician Berni Canani believes the evidence for fasting-mimicking diets in children is still too limited to be recommended in Italy's clinical **guidelines** (رہنما اصول: directives, protocols, standards).

He also worries restrictive diets could carry **psychological** (نفسیاتی: mental, emotional, cognitive) risks for adolescents, whose relationship with food is still developing.

"I fear that **imposing** (نافذ کرنا: enforcing, applying, dictating) food restrictions on teenagers could increase the risk of eating **disorders** (خرابیاں: ailments, conditions, illnesses), anorexia and body dysmorphia," he says.

Meanwhile, Salvatore hopes to have surgery in the summer, so that, for the first time in years, he can wear a swimming costume without feeling **self-conscious** (جھجک محسوس کرنے والا؛ embarrassed, awkward, uneasy).

But he is not alone. Across Italy, a **generation** (نسل؛ age group, cohort, era) of children is growing up increasingly removed from the Mediterranean diet that once made the country famous.



Source: BBC World Service Global Health | Vocabulary edition prepared for Scholar Eye study use
Urdu meanings and English synonyms added for CSS / PMS / PPSC / NTS vocabulary-building practice