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Health preservation as basis of national sovereignty

“Nutrition and breathing are two of the most important functions of the body, without which we cannot survive.” With this opening remark, Yulia Bordovskikh, a former TV star of the NTV channel, who authored the best-selling book “Vitamin L” about a healthy lifestyle, kick-started the session “Features of National Nutrition: Health Preservation as the Basis of Sovereignty” at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF 2026).

The subject is more than relevant, more than ever, and it falls into the category of bread-and-butter issues of the day or “Careful what you wish for,” or rather, be apprehensive of your bad habits.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 17.9 million people pass away due to cardiovascular diseases (CVD) every year. In Russia, CVD is the leading cause of death. In 2022, this disease, in all its forms, claimed the lives of 815,000 Russian citizens. Obesity has become a deadly affliction: in 2025, about 36 million Russians – one in every four – were diagnosed with obesity. The relationship between this sad and alarming statistic and the quality of life is apparent.

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"Traffic Light" code has become a smart advisor

It was only natural that Anna Popova, the head of Rospotrebnadzor, was the first to be given the floor at the session. The mandate of the Federal Service for Supervision of Consumer Rights Protection and Human Welfare embraces the issue of healthy nutrition, including the organization of school meals and ensuring the quality and safety of food products.

Anna Popova informed the audience that her department had carried out large-scale inspections of the food rations in kindergartens and schools, as well as of the “food on the shop shelves,” as well as surveys and laboratory tests, which covered almost every corner of the country.

“Now we have proper knowledge of the existing shortages (of health food) in every region of the Russian Federation,” said Anna Popova. “The country is very vast, and the food ration varies.” Based on the climate, national characteristics, and traditions, Rospotrebnadzor experts have developed recommendations for shaping food composition, particularly in organized groups of children.

"At the end of 2024, I wrote a letter to each governor with recommendations tailored for each region, taking into account the existing deficit," Anna Popova continued. – Many of the top officials enacted these recommendations to work, but some did not. Actually, this is the subject of our further cooperation with the regions."

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Based on the results of the probes and research held in 2025, Rospotrebnadzor developed 15 new recommendations for correcting the diets of various population groups.

The tendency of the society to adopt the principles of a "healthy lifestyle" (HLS) has become entrenched. In the second stage of the All-Russian Health Quiz 2026, 1.1 million people participated. According to the outcome of this quiz, 76.5% of respondents answered correctly to all questions related to recommended physical activity levels and healthy eating standards. "A few years ago, only 60% of respondents answered correctly, but today, 76.5% of respondents provided the exactly correct answer. This amounts to a positive trend," commented Anna Popova.

Rospotrebnadzor has also applied the method of digitalization by launching the "Honest MARK" application. As soon as you scan the marking QR-code, the food composition is displayed according to the "Traffic Light" scale, where the color (green, yellow, or red) on the product packaging indicates the level of salt, sugar, and saturated fatty acids in accordance with the daily-recommended intake.

"We currently have the strictest standards in the world for the content of harmful substances, hormones, chemical elements, antibiotics, and microorganisms. We strictly adhere to these standards," emphasized Anna Popova. – Here are the results of a joint project with Magnit (major retail chain): over the past 4 years, the share of vegetables bought by consumers, judging by the cash register, has increased by 30%. The main thing is to teach people how to opt for healthy food."

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The info-Gypsies were shown the door

The idea of proper and healthy nutrition is gaining ground among the people. This has led to an influx of advisers with questionable expertise and ulterior motives. It's like the return of the con artists and preachers from the murky 1990s. As a result, it's the responsibility of true medical professionals to weed out the self-proclaimed prophets. The word "cut off" was used by the Minister of Health, Mikhail Murashko, who announced during the session that, starting from September 1, his order on the approval of the specialty "nutritionist" in the nomenclature of positions for mid-level medical personnel will come into effect.

The Minister emphasized that dietary patterns are becoming a "long-term factor in health, demography, and the economy." According to statistics, 50% of Russians consume confectionery products daily, and another 23% consume various types of sausages, leading to an excess of salt and sugar in the body. As one of the consequences, there is a steady increase in chronic non-communicable diseases.

The prevalence of obesity is becoming a serious headache, including for the medical professionals, Mikhail Murashko noted. Obesity is a burden on the cardiovascular system. The heart is forced to pump more blood. In addition, it puts a strain on the gastrointestinal tract and the nervous system as a whole.

In addition, patients develop obstructive sleep apnea (OSA), a chronic condition characterized by repeated episodes of partial or complete cessation of breathing during sleep due to the narrowing or collapse of the upper respiratory tract. Furthermore, the development of obesity-hypoventilation syndrome (OHS), also known as Pickwickian syndrome, leads to the accumulation of fat in the cheeks, throat, and mechanical compression. As a result, the minister explained, "a person constantly wakes up tired in the morning, feels sleepy during the day, and the lack of oxygen exacerbates the course of arrhythmias and much more."

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In his list of “barriers to a healthy diet,” Dr. Murashko pointed out that “cheap calories are prevalent in the market, and companies that promote these products often use sugar not only to enhance the taste but also to extend the shelf life of their products.” Stereotypes and the “deep-rooted belief” that a well-fed life is necessarily sweet and fatty also serve as barriers. The Minister called for “more attention to be paid to family traditions and child-rearing, as the family is the primary source of basic habits.”

Additional food for thought:

The new direction of scientific research and prevention of ill health is the biology of aging, based on the medicine of pre-risks. This approach means that early changes in the body are monitored before they develop into diseases. In practical terms, this implies a constant monitoring system for making timely decisions on the correction of... lifestyle, which organically includes recommendations for changing the diet, if it turns into a source of health hazards.

Recall the idea formulated in the 5th century BC by the ancient Greek physician Hippocrates, who had no idea that his descendants would talk about "medicine of healthy longevity": "Let food be your medicine for the sake as medication not becoming your food."

Danger! A brutal bodybuilder praises sausages

“Agricultural products, and the vast majority of them are meant for food, are not intended to fill the country’s granaries and

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report on another super-rich harvest," said Oleg Kobiakov, Director of the FAO Liaison Office with the Russian Federation. "They should be accessible to people and consumed in a healthy and beneficial way."

It is no coincidence that the first FAO Director-General was John Boyd Orr, a Scottish biologist and physician, who became the head of FAO in 1945. He was involved in issues related to food security, hunger, and malnutrition (co-authoring the study "Nutrition of the Population During War"), and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1949.

There are various mechanisms in place to promote healthy eating practices in both theory and practice. The FAO collaborates with the WHO on the Codex Alimentarius. This is a collection of food standards, guidelines, norms, and regulations created to protect consumer health and promote good trade practices in the food industry.

The Codex Alimentarius was developed with the active participation of experts from the Russian Federation. However, Russian domestic standards for food safety are often more stringent, if not more rigid, than those in many other countries.

Statistics both please and upset

According to a survey of 3,500 Russian citizens, approximately 17% of respondents, said Valery Fedorov, Director General of the VCIOM (Russian Public Opinion Research Center), "to put it bluntly, say that in general they adhere to a healthy diet – this is regardless of what they understand by this." In the social group of Russians with a solid financial situation, this share is twice as high – almost 31%. However, according to the opinionics expert, "overcoming the barrier of economic inequality does not automatically lead to a change in people's eating habits."

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One of the reasons is that the information field on healthy eating is like a marketplace, where everyone is shouting and interrupting each other, Valery Fedorov lamented. "God only knows what ends up in people's heads. You can trust bloggers, coaches, and search for information yourself, but there is no clear, concise, and understandable framework for new information."

"It is encouraging that 86% of Russians, according to other surveys, say that they strive to follow healthy eating habits," said Maxim Protasov, head of Roskachestvo (National quality system of Russia). "It is clear that striving does not necessarily mean following. However, the fact that this desire exists is a positive development. Now, it is important to convert this desire into reality as much as possible." The benefits are obvious, as analysts have established that productivity increases by 20% to 25% in this case. However, the survey results are disappointing: 29% of Russians do not know the rational consumption norms and are "extremely far" from following the principles of a healthy lifestyle.

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During the session “Features of National Nutrition: Health Preservation as the Basis of Sovereignty”, along with an optimistic assessment of the emerging trend towards improving the mental leaning of fellow citizens and their daily habits, authoritative and distinguished debaters stated: "Despite the obvious value of a healthy lifestyle, traditional approaches to shaping responsible behavior, including those based on prohibitive measures, do not always lead to sustainable results."

As a result, "a significant part of the population, even realizing the benefits of a healthy lifestyle, does not change established behavioral patterns." An English idiom comes to mind: "Old habits die hard".

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Taking into account the delicate balance of positive trends and negative practices, the final chord could be the key message in Mikhail Murashko's speech, explaining the challenges we face and the goals we should strive for: "The strategic outcome of our joint efforts should be the strengthening of the nation's health, the extension of active longevity, and the enhancement of demographic potential."

Vadim Vikhrov

* *Photos by Vladimir Mikheev*

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