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He's no Norm, but a belly good bloke

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BALLOONING waistlines have forced the Federal Government to inflate its latest weapon against obesity — a chubby man made from balloons.

Eric, described as “likeable but overweight”, will go to air as part of a \$41 million, four-year campaign to help Australians beat the bulge.

The bright blue cartoon character will urge Australians to become a nation of “swappers” in the “Swap it don’t stop it” campaign.

Swap what?

Well, this portly character advocates swapping white bread for wholegrain, big bowls for small bowls, or sitting on a picnic rug for tossing a Frisbee.

In one of the ads he is seen poking his balloon belly, saying he will swap more for less.

It remains to be seen if Eric has the same effect as quintessential couch potato Norm, who became a household name after the 1975 campaign “Life. Be in it.”

Obesity Policy Coalition senior policy adviser Jane Martin said social marketing providing people with practical advice was an important part of the fight against obesity.

But she pointed out Eric’s advertisements would be up against campaigns from companies that make unhealthy foods.

“It’s an effort to stay fit and healthy because we are working against a tide of messages which are against it,” Ms Martin said.

“Children are facing a barrage of junk food marketing that these ads will have to

compete with.”

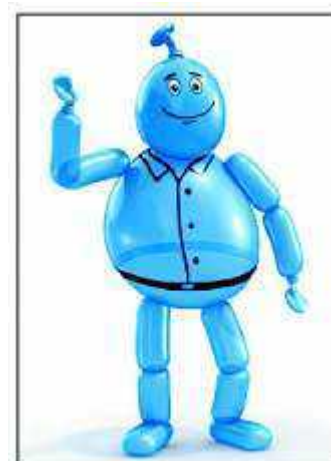
She said the Government should reinforce these messages by introducing measures such as reducing junk food advertisements to children.

“People recognising a character like Norm is different to changing their behaviour as a result of a social marketing campaign,” she said.

Health Minister Nicola Roxon said the TV, print and radio campaign was aimed at men and women aged 25-50 with children.

“Losing weight doesn’t have to be hard. Those little decisions made in the supermarket aisles, in the kitchen or when playing with the kids can make a real difference,” she said.

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True blue: Eric