CREATING HEALTHY WORKPLACES

Helping employers build healthy and supportive work environments

Contents

Employee Resources Pack:

Introduction

March 4th 2021 is World Obesity Day

Obesity is a global disease. It affects hundreds of millions of people, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has only served to exacerbate an already urgent situation.

Now is the time to come together to address an issue that impacts us all. This World Obesity Day we invite employers to strengthen their role in creating a healthier world. In times of crisis, **every body needs everybody** and as employers, this means **YOU.**

Employers have an opportunity and responsibility to create a healthy work environment in both formal workplaces and new 'work-from-home' situations. It is not only about the physical work space, but the practical and emotional support needed for employees to remain healthy and prevent or manage obesity.

With obesity on the rise and now the unprecedented challenge of COVID-19, some employers may be struggling to support employee health.

The following resources are here to help you as employers:

1 Understand obesity as a disease and a risk factor for other diseases

2 Use best-practice to build healthy workplace environments

3 Communicate with employees effectively and sensitively on the topic of obesity

We invite you to use World Obesity Day on March 4th as an opportunity to engage with your employees about obesity and health more generally.

These resources will help you start a dialogue with your teams about how you can best support them in living healthy, happy lives - something crucial to any productive, effective and cheerful organizations.

Why Now?

800

MILLION
800 Million people around the world are living with obesity.

OBESITY

Obesity is a disease and a risk factor for other diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and some cancers.

2X

PEOPLE
People living with obesity are twice as likely to be hospitalized if tested positive for COVID-19.

$1

TRILLION
The medical consequences of obesity will cost over $1 trillion by 2025.

Obesity is one of the biggest public health problems facing the world today. It impacts an individual's physical and mental health and puts them at greater risk from other chronic diseases, including heart disease, diabetes and some cancers.

Obesity is increasing across all segments of society. For many, unhealthy workplaces can contribute to the physical, emotional and economic impact of obesity. Adopting a healthy workplace can help reduce the impact on employees and organisations.

Ongoing research into the COVID-19 epidemic has shown that people living with obesity are more at risk of complications from the virus, whilst changes in working and living patterns during lockdown may further impact physical and mental health, both in the short- and long-term.

In this challenging time, employees are looking to their employers to support them.

The Impact of COVID-19

People living with obesity have a much higher risk of poor outcomes from COVID-19.

They may be subject to longer or more complete isolation periods and face disruption to their healthcare support. Living with obesity may mean that people experience different or additional impacts on their physical and mental health.

Many employees are finding themselves in new, challenging work-from-home environments. which can make it harder to manage and prevent overweight and obesity, including:

- Increased stress levels impacting sleep, eating patterns and mental health.

- Additional pressures on people to 'get in shape' during lockdown.

- Changes in mealtime routines.

- Decreased access to healthy food as a result of quarantining.

- Decreased physical activity due to changes in commute and restrictions on outdoor activites or facilities.

- Childcare and additional obligations that limit opportunities for healthy choices.

- Increased screen time and exposure to unhealthy food advertising.

- Disruption in access to appropriate medical treatments and appointments.

Learn more about COVID-19 and obesity here.

Obesity: Know the facts

Obesity is widely misunderstood. For employers to support staff effectively, they must understand what obesity is, what factors drive it and how to talk about it. You may also want to include an understanding of obesity module in any health and HR training that you run for staff or management.

Obesity is a disease

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines obesity as "abnormal or excessive fat accumulation that presents a risk to health". It is a chronic disease driven by complex factors, many of which are outside of an individual's control.

The roots of obesity run deep. Diet and exercise are contributors, but a variety of biological and genetic factors can predispose people to a higher risk of obesity. Our physical and social environment can also expose us to unhealthy foods designed to make us eat more.

Employers need to recognise obesity as a disease and take this into consideration when developing HR policies and health initiatives.

Obesity is not a matter of lifestyle

There are many stigmatizing assumptions made about people living with obesity. It is often presented as a lifestyle choice or a lack of willpower. The mantra to 'eat less, move more' fails to acknowledge that obesity is a disease and that there are many other factors that may impact health.

Individuals should not be blamed for their disease.

Be aware of weight bias and stigma

Weigh bias describes negative attitudes and assumptions based on an individual's weight. This can often lead to weight stigma when people act on that bias. In many countries, people living with obesity and overweight suffer from stigma, weight bias and discrimination. This can affect mental and physical wellbeing and may prevent people from seeking necessary medical care.

In a work setting, it's important to be aware of potential areas of weight bias, including hiring processes, promotions, disciplinary actions and contract termination rates. In some instances, people with obesity are often paid less than healthy-weight counterparts for the same work. This is more pronounced for women, who may receive up to 6% less for the same work, whilst men with obesity may tend to sort themselves into lower-paying jobs. Employers can address stigma at work by maintaining rigorous HR processes and creating a culture of support, education and inclusivity.

The social and cultural context of a country will impact the perception of overweight and obesity. While people's external reactions towards people living with obesity may differ, the health issues and risks associated with obesity are consistent. It is therefore important to ensure that messaging about obesity is tailored to the local and national context.

Obesity in the workplace

A driving factor of obesity is the **'obesogenic environment'**: the influence that surroundings, opportunities or conditions of life have on promoting obesity. Many people spend over half their waking day at work, so work environments play a key role in overall health. This environment includes the physical work space, company culture and policies.

Investing in appropriate resources and support can positively impact productivity, employee engagement, healthcare costs, staff retention, talent retention and company reputation. Unhealthy and stressful workplaces are associated with greater dissatisfaction and harassment for those who are living with overweight or obesity. Companies that promote health in the workplace can significantly reduce absenteeism and presenteeism, and improve overall work relations and productivity.

Legal Requirements

As employers, you are likely to have legal obligations to monitor and support the mental and physical wellbeing of your employees, both 'on-site' and when working from home.

Obesity is a disease. Be sure to consider relevant policies, recommendations and laws when supporting employees living with obesity.

Communication

Obesity can be a difficult issue to discuss, but it is important to show employees that it is a topic that can be discussed in a safe, non-judgmental environment.

Language:
Consider the language you use when discussing obesity. Use 'people-first' language' that puts the individual before the disease, eg use the phrase "people living with obesity" instead of "obese people". A person is not defined by their condition and your language should reflect that. Learn more about people-first language **here.**

Discussions around obesity should focus on health, not weight loss. Emphasis should be on the health benefits of living an active and balanced lifestyle. Avoid negative assumptions regarding an individual's current eating or exercise patterns. It is important to recognize that people living with obesity may have specific requirements. Take this into consideration when discussing obesity and make sure not to place the responsibility for addressing obesity on individuals.

Imagery:
Be aware of potentially stigmatizing imagery. Images used to illustrate the subject of obesity often depict people with obesity from unflattering angles, inactive or consuming unhealthy food. They often focus on abdomens or lower bodies, and exclude heads from the frame. If you are addressing issues of obesity in your employee communications, be sure to use images from non-stigmatizing **image banks** and carefully consider how you represent people living with obesity.

Recommendations:
FOSTERING A HEALTHY WORKPLACE

Below is some core guidance for a healthy workplace. Remember the goal is to achieve improvements in long-term health.

1 **Create a culture of health:** People must feel supported in their health journey. Recognize the impact of stress on obesity and adopt written
and unwritten policies that explicitly encourage employees to prioritize health throughout the working day.

2 **Implement policies that tackle stigma:** Review HR policies to check for biases at all stages. Pay special attention to your biases during interviews, promotion considerations, penalizations, wage offers, position assignments, and in your general language use.

3 **Pair prevention with treatment:** The workplace should be an environment that encourages healthy habits including healthy eating and living an
active lifestyle. However, it is important to ensure treatment options and policies are in place to support employees living with obesity. The roots of obesity are complex and varied, and comprehensive obesity care should cover behavioral counseling, anti-obesity medications or bariatric surgery, depending on needs.

4 **Listen to your employees:** No single approach will work for all employees. It depends on organizational size and structure, employee demographics, business operations and company resources. Studies have shown that 'generic' employee wellness programmes rarely work. The first step towards building a tailored approach towards employee health is to begin by surveying your workforce and finding out what support they really need.

5 **Be wary of 'fad' initiatives:** 'Tick box' health initiatives often place responsibility on employees to 'fix' themselves, when the reality is obesity requires integrated, long-term approaches. Nutritional and exercise goals can contribute to an overall healthy lifestyle, but be sure to acknowledge the wider roots of obesity when implementing health initiatives. Remember that some employees living with obesity may not be able to take part in certain activities and programmes. Effective employee health
policies are about creating a lasting culture of support and inclusivity.

6 **Strong and visible leadership:** Support is needed at all levels of the organization. Programs are more successful when there is particaption and buy-in from management and leadership.

7 **Communicate effectively and through multiple channels:** Be clear about your company mission and the practical support on offer. Communicate with employees through a variety of means (emails, posters, announcements at meetings etc)

8 **Monitor Progress:** Continue to recognize
where your organization is succeeding and where improvement is needed. Any improvement is good so be realistic with your expectations and your tracking. Identify which areas need modification.

Recommendations:
PRACTICAL STEPS

It can be difficult to translate employee needs into effective health strategies. Rather than rely only on short-term incentives such as step counts and weight-loss goals, create a physical and cultural environment that promotes good mental and physical health.

General:

- If offered, insurance policies should support employees living with or at risk of obesity.

- Offer discounted access to inclusive health clubs and facilities, but be sure not to present this in a way that may alienate employees who do not or cannot use them.

- Offer training on topics such as nutrition, stress management, mental health and general wellbeing.

- Offer appropriate behavioral counseling and treatment options for employees living with obesity.

- Where possible actively encourage employees to work flexibly. Explicitly encourage regular breaks from the computer.

On Site:

- Provide minimally processed and natural food options in cafeterias.

- Avoid vending machines that stock ultra-processed foods due to storage requirements.

- Provide healthier food at meetings and events - make healthy options the default.

- While physical activity is not a 'quick fix' for obesity, living an active lifestyle confers a number of additional health benefits and must be taken into consideration in the workplace.

- Encourage healthy commutes by providing showering and changing facilities, bike storage or 'cycle to work' schemes.

- Make sure that work stations are comfortable and well set-up.

- Walking areas and stairs should be safe, accessible, well-lit and attractive.

Working from home:

- Lead a positive work-from-home campaign.

- Acknowledge the additional challenges that may come from new working environments, both in terms of social, physical and mental health.

- Provide a safe and accessible forum for employees to communicate their needs and concerns about changes in their work or workplace.

- Ensure employees feel connected and supported in remote working environments. Encourage informal team check-ins and confidential mental health checks.

- Where possible actively encourage employees to work flexibly and take regular screen breaks.

- Run virtual ergonomic checks on employee workstations to help them use their at-home work set-up safely. Where possible provide suitable ergonomic equipment.

Next steps

Get inspried! See what other employers are doing:

Business Group on Health INFOGRAPHIC: The Global Employer Landscape for Overweight & Obesity

Get involved! Learn more about obesity and support the **'Every body Needs Everybody'** campaign at:

World Obesity Day 4 March 2021

EVERY BODY NEEDS EVERYBODY

Start the conversation!

Use the following resources
to share with your employees.

EMPLOYEE RESOURCES

World
Obesity
Day 4 March 2021

EVERY
BODY
NEEDS
EVERYBODY

How to use these resources

We hope that you will use World Obesity Day on March 4th as a launchpad to start conversations with employees about obesity and overall health in the workplace.

Please see below for an outline of the resources included and our suggestions for how to use them:

1

Digital Resources:
Circulate resources in an email or intranet post on World Obesity Day

- Sample email or intranet post: Simply copy and paste our pre-prepared email and attach the other resources. Alternatively, feel free to email using your own wording.

- Share the Obesity Factsheet and Roots of Obesity as attachments.

- Follow up this initial email or post with more information about your organization's policies around obesity, and how employees can access support.

2

Print Resources:
If employees are still on location for work, print and display posters in communal areas on World Obesity Day:

- 4 Sample posters are ready to download and print.

- Use our campaign **resources** to create your own posters incorporating your own logos and using some of our different World Obesity Day messages.

- Create your own '**story**' posters: If employees would like to share their own stories of living with obesity or supporting people living with obesity, you can create your own case study posters.

3

Support World Obesity Day:
Use our assets to show your organization's support for World Obesity Day in emails, on your intranet and on your social media. Encourage your employees to get involved, support our message and share a selfie doing our 'O' For Obesity hand symbol.

TODAY IS WORLD OBESITY DAY.

Obesity is a disease that affects us all and we all have our part to play in addressing a global crisis. Now - more than ever - we must recognise that every body needs everybody.

We want to support you and your health. As employers, we have a role in building happier, healthier and longer lives for everybody. This is even more important in light of the challenges of COVID-19.

Today, we are supporting the World Obesity Day campaign and invite you to do the same.

Want to know the facts about obesity? You'll find some important resources attached here. **To learn more and share your own story, visit the World Obesity Day website.**

Why now?

2X
PEOPLE
People living with obesity are twice as likely to be hospitalized if tested positive for Covid-19.

OBESITY
Obesity is a disease and a risk factor for other diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and some cancers

STIGMA
Weight stigma can have tangible impacts on professional life, including hiring and promotion opportunities, salary and role allocation.

800
MILLION
800 Million people around the world are living with obesity.

The Impact of COVID-19

Learn more about COVD-19 and obesity here

COVID-19 has impacted us all. It is important that we acknowledge and address some of the ways in which it might affect our lives, our work and our health:

- Increased stress can impact sleep, eating patterns and mental health;
- Home working can change our eating habits, making healthy choices harder;
- Quarantine can make it harder to access healthy food;
- Lock-down restrictions and changes in our commute may limit physical exercise;
- Childcare and other obligations can limit time and ability to make healthy choices;
- Isolation and disrupted work patters can impact our mental health and prevent us from taking breaks;
- More time online can expose us to ads for unhealthy food. Social media can also put unhealthy pressure on us to use lockdown periods to 'get in shape'.
- Disruption to health services - a big barrier for people already with obesity which could in turn have an impact on their work performance/productivity.

We want to help you build a healthy workplace, even when working from home. Talk to your line manager about how we can help.

World Obesity Day 4 March 2021

EVERY BODY NEEDS EVERYBODY

OBESITY FACT SHEET

1 WHAT IS OBESITY?

The World Health Organisation defines obesity as 'abnormal or excessive fat accumulation that presents a risk to health'. It can be measured in a number of ways, but the most common is 'BMI' (Body Mass Index), using your height and weight to work out if your weight is healthy. Additional measurements, such as your waist to height ratio can also be used.

2 OBESITY IS A DISEASE

Obesity is a disease and must be treated as one. There are many factors that can put people at higher risk of developing obesity, including biology, genes, mental health, access to healthcare and exposure to ultra-processed, unhealthy foods.
Obesity it is not due to a lack of will power.
Learn more about the different roots of obesity on the website.

3 OBESITY IS A RISK FACTOR

Living with obesity puts people at a higher risk from other diseases including heart disease, diabetes and some cancers. People living with obesity also have a greater risk of severe illness and even death if they contract COVID-19.

4 'EAT LESS, MOVE MORE' DOES NOT "FIX" OBESITY

People living with obesity are often told that the answer is to 'eat less, move more'. However, addressing obesity is not just a matter of diet and exercise. When we tell people to 'eat less, move more', we ignore other important factors. Although physical exercise plays an important part in overall health, it is not a significant factor in managing obesity. Rather than blaming individuals for their disease, we must encourage governments and policy makers to address the root causes.

5 WEIGHT STIGMA IS DANGEROUS

In many countries, people living with obesity are regularly blamed for their disease. Weight stigma suggests that obesity is due to individual failure, and puts responsibility on people living with obesity to 'fix' it. It can damage mental and physical wellbeing and prevent people from seeking necessary medical care.
While stigma may be different across the world, one thing is clear: experiencing discrimination due to weight does not help people to adopt healthier lifestyles. In fact, it can make it harder.

6 INDIVIDUALS ARE NOT TO BLAME FOR THEIR OBESITY

Obesity is often driven by forces outside of a person's control. This includes biological, genetic and environmental factors. A person's biology and genes can put them at greater risk. Our physical environment can impact our access to healthy food, suitable medical care and opportunities for a healthy, active life. Our environment can also affect our mental and emotional health, which in turn impact obesity.

7 OBESITY IS NOT JUST ABOUT WEIGHT

Treating obesity is about improving overall health, not just about losing weight. It is possible for a person with a higher BMI to be managing their disease and living at a 'healthy weight'.

8 OBESITY IS NO LONGER JUST A DISEASE OF RICH COUNTRIES

Obesity is rising fastest in countries with lower incomes. Many of these countries have to address both obesity and under-nutrition at the same time. Obesity is especially prevalent in poorer and more vulnerable communities.

9 CHILDHOOD OBESITY CAN AND MUST BE PREVENTED AND TREATED

Childhood obesity rates have nearly doubled every 10 years. It can profoundly affect childrens' physical health, social, and emotional well-being, and self esteem. It is associated with poor academic performance and a lower quality of life. It is often carried into adulthood, so prevention and treatment are vital to stopping a global rise in obesity.
Nutrition, physical activity and healthcare all play a role.

2X
PEOPLE
People living with obesity are twice as likely to be hospitalized if tested positive for COVID-19

60%
CHILDHOOD
Childhood obesity is expected to increase by 60% over the next decade, reaching 250 million by 2030.

$1
TRILLION
The medical consequences of obesity will cost over $1 trillion by 2025.

800
BILLION
800 Million people around the world are living with obesity

Learn more at worldobesityday.org

World Obesity Day 4 March 2021

EVERY BODY NEEDS EVERYBODY

The roots of obesity run deep

Together we can create a healthier future.

To have a real impact on obesity, we need to work together to address its many root causes throughout society. Simplifying the disease to any one cause can make treating it even harder. So we must raise awareness and improve access to the appropriate information.

Let's work together to combat the root causes of obesity.

OBESITY

biology · food · genetic risk · healthcare access · life events · marketing · mental health · sleep · stigma

1 BIOLOGY

The human body has in-built mechanisms to protect itself from starvation – this can make it hard to maintain weight loss.

2 FOOD

Ultra-processed food, now seen across the globe, is contributing to the rapid rise in obesity.

3 GENETIC RISK

Our genes account for somewhere between 40-70% of likelihood of developing obesity.

4 HEALTHCARE ACCESS

Without access to trained healthcare professionals, most people who suffer from obesity won't reach and maintain a healthy long-term weight goal.

5 LIFE EVENTS

Prenatal life, early adulthood, pregnancy, illnesses and medications can all influence weight gain.

6 MARKETING

There is a complex relationship between food systems and health, with marketing of foodstuffs having a known link to obesity.

7 MENTAL HEALTH

Symptoms of some mental health disorders, and their associated medications, can lead to weight gain.

8 SLEEP

Lack of sleep disturbs hormones which can affect your weight – as can high levels of stress.

9 STIGMA

Weight discrimination and stigma can have significant consequences for somebody with obesity.

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EVERY BODY NEEDS EVERYBODY

BETTER NUTRITION

for EVERY BODY…

…Means happier, healthier and longer lives for EVERYBODY

For healthier and longer lives, we must provide the best nutritional environment possible.

World Obesity Day

EVERY BODY

BETTER NUTRITION
for EVERY BODY...

...Means happier, healthier and longer lives for **EVERYBODY**

For healthier and longer lives, we must provide the best nutritional environment possible.

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EVERY BODY NEEDS EVERYBODY

EQUALITY
for EVERY BODY...

...Means happier, healthier and longer lives for EVERYBODY

We should all strive for the equal treatment of every body.

World Obesity Day 4 March 2021

EVERY BODY NEEDS EVERYBODY

HEALTHCARE
for EVERY BODY...

...Means happier, healthier and longer lives for **EVERYBODY**

We can't treat diseases like obesity without the appropriate healthcare systems.

World Obesity Day 4 March

EVERY BODY NEEDS