



# THE LOOMING CRISIS

UNDERSTANDING THE GLOBAL IMPACT OF

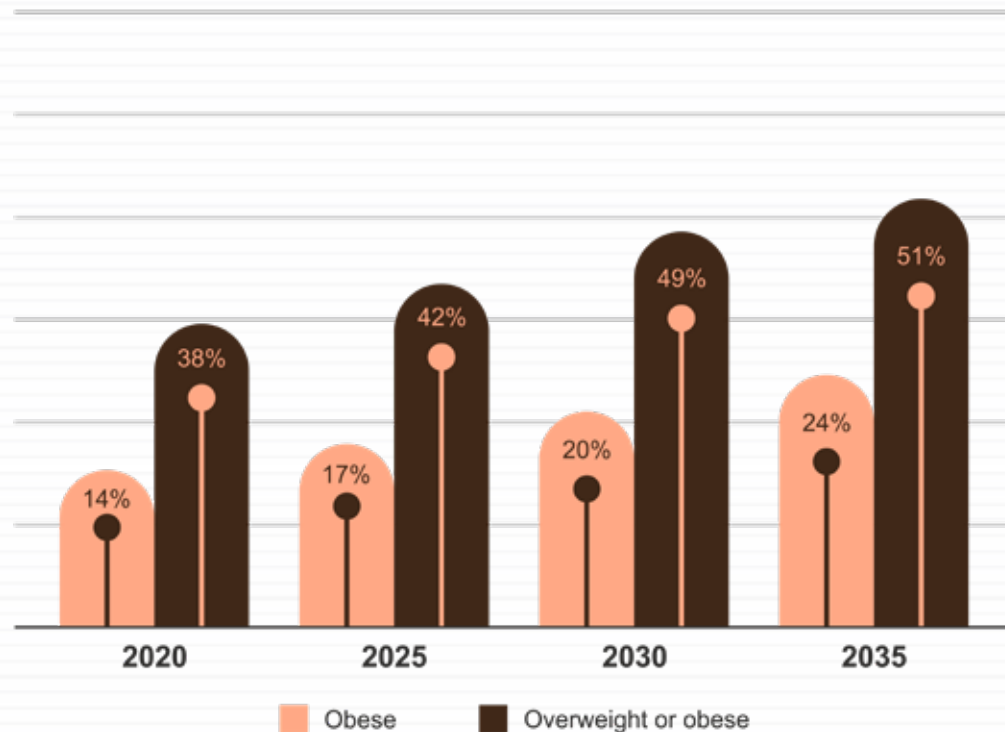
# OBESITY

ON WORKPLACE PRODUCTIVITY

**T**he World Obesity Atlas 2023, published by the World Obesity Federation predicts that the majority of the global population i.e. 51 per cent will be either overweight or obese by 2035 if there's no change in the current trends. The global impact will reach \$4.32 trillion annually by 2035 if there's no improvement in prevention and treatment measures.

In another study at ENDO 2023, the Endocrine Society's annual conference in Chicago, Illinois, obese people may be less productive at work due to increased risk of sickness.

## SHARE OF GLOBAL POPULATION WITH OVERWEIGHT OR OBESITY



### HOW OBESITY AFFECTS WORKPLACE PRODUCTIVITY?

The consequences of obesity are infinite. It leads to cardiovascular diseases, asthma, breathlessness, musculoskeletal problems, daytime sleepiness, respiratory diseases, depression, hypertension, fatigue and psychological problems.

Overweight workers at the workplace are more likely to have lower productivity and more injuries, therefore leading to loss of work. But how exactly?

*Employers incur \$153 billion in losses every year due to employee obesity and other chronic health issues. These costs include paying sick leaves, lost revenue due to illness, insurance costs and more.*

#### ■ INCREASED INJURIES AND ILLNESSES

An overweight or obese employee would face difficulty in carrying out

physical work, which includes flexibility and mobility. This limits the worker from doing certain types of duties which a healthy worker would be able to do easily.

Think of a manufacturing company where employees are responsible for moving heavy machines and equipment. Person A, who maintains a healthy weight will easily manoeuvre around the factory, lifting heavy loads without much difficulty. On the other hand, Person B, who struggles with obesity will find it extremely challenging to perform tasks that require physical exertion. Person B will take a longer time to complete the same task which Person A can do effortlessly. Furthermore, Person B is prone to the risk of workplace accidents or musculoskeletal injuries.

#### ■ INCREASED ABSENTEEISM

Obese employees take comparatively more leaves due to sickness, personal injury or disease than workers who maintain a healthy weight.

Consider an office environment where employees work on tight deadlines and collaborative projects. Person A maintains a healthy lifestyle and rarely takes any sick leave. However, Person B is overweight and struggles with various health issues like fatigue, respiratory issues and joint pain. Person B takes more sick days and personal leave than Person A.

Increased absenteeism, thus, affects productivity and disrupts workflow, potentially impacting the project deadlines and efficiency.

#### ■ INCREASED COMPENSATION COSTS

Obese people take more time to heal. When they fall sick, there may be further complications associated with higher medical costs. This eventually leads to greater pressure on compensation schemes in the workplace. As the medical treatments may take longer time, they may require extended medical attention and care.

### NOW THE SOLUTIONS!

Obesity is seen as a lifestyle choice rather than a medical condition.

The fact is that obesity is straining resources. There's a lot that can be done from the employer's side to help employees achieve and maintain a healthy weight. Many workplace adaptations, programs and activities can encourage employees to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

#### ■ CREATE A SIMPLE AND EASY CULTURE

First and foremost, replace sugary beverages with healthy foods (at meetings, in cafeterias and vending machines). Replace unhealthy snacks with low-fat popcorn, fruits and other healthier options. Create pleasant eating environments. Give proper breaks for meals. All these steps will help people struggling with obesity to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

*Employees who opt for unhealthy food are 66% more likely to be less productive at the workplace than those who make better food choices.*

#### ■ HEALTHY FOOD ALTERNATIVES

Encourage employees to bring healthy food like fresh fruits— apples, bananas, grapes, or oranges. They can switch to home-cooked meals for lunch. Every month, you can host a potluck where every employee can bring a home-made dish to share, along with its recipe. You can also ask a cooking expert if they'd be willing to teach evening cooking classes for your employees.

*Proper nutrition can increase job performance by 25%.*

#### ■ ENCOURAGE STAIRS OVER ESCALATORS AND LIFTS

What's better than taking

stairs instead of escalators? The best way to stay healthy is to take stairs, whenever possible. To put it in simple words, walking stimulates circulation, lymphatic drainage, and hormone production. Thus, climbing the stairs can help in maintaining a healthier lifestyle.

*A human being burns 0.17 calories per step climbed; 2 calories burned for one flight of 12 steps.*

#### ■ ORGANISE PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

You can organise some physical activities like walking challenges like the 10,000 steps/day challenge, or a 30-minute/day exercise challenge. You can offer fitness trackers or recommend wellness apps that help employees track their physical activity and set personalised fitness goals. Moreover, hiking, biking, or nature walks can also be a good option to encourage physical movement. Another best way is to do meetings while walking as this would help them stay active.

*Workers who don't exercise regularly are 96% more likely to suffer from productivity loss.*

### THE BOTTOM LINES

The escalating global obesity trend necessitates the addressing of obesity-related challenges. Obesity significantly affects workplace productivity. Employers bear a heavy financial burden due to employee obesity. Encouraging healthy food choices, promoting physical activity, and creating a supportive environment can play a pivotal role in mitigating the impact of obesity on productivity.



*Dr. Rajendra Pratap Gupta*

## Obesity kills profits

If we consider the linkage between obesity, productivity and the workplace, it is clear that obese employees are directly impacting the profitability of the corporate world.

Obesity is a complex chronic disease, is now a major workplace hazard, and is associated with multiple morbidities. It is a personal health hazard and an economic liability for corporations. Any chronic disease will impact one's daily functioning and lead to stress, which can directly impact one's professional deliverables. Even human dynamics get impacted due to its psychological impact, and this can have a snowballing impact on the productivity of an obese team member.

Obese people are likely to take more leaves, fall sick often, and report absenteeism – the Short-term disability (STD) claims to increase by 25% as the BMI increases from 30-35. Obesity accounts for between 6.5 % and 12.6% of the total absenteeism costs in the US. As the competition increases for corporations, obesity amongst employees can drastically impact the profits and make an organization unviable given that most sectors have a low double-digit net profitability.

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