

# Obesity 'epidemic' on the rise

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Just look around. No matter where you go, chances are you will find overweight or obese people. Obesity bariatric surgeon Dr Abhay Agrawal says for several people, reducing weight has become an urgent need. "A lazy lifestyle, coupled with unhealthy eating habits, have made us obese, not just overweight. According to the National Family Health Survey of India, approximately 15% of our country's population is obese. That's more than 10 million people. This is a side-effect of prosperity, stress and the lack of time for maintaining one's health."

Laparoscopic surgeon and obesity expert Dr Muffazal Lakdawala defines obesity as accumulation of fat that exceeds the existing standards. "The National Institute of Health (NIH) states that excessive weight becomes a health hazard when it is 20% or more above the ideal body weight. More and more youngsters these days are becoming obese," he says.

## CAUSES

Research blames changed lifestyles, energy-dense diets and low-levels of physical activity for the rise in obesity. "However, various other factors may also trigger the problem. These include heredity, hormonal imbalance, side-effects of certain drugs and psychological problems like depression or boredom due to which people tend to eat more. Several studies have attributed the problem to eating out frequently. This leads to increased calorie intake -- one meal in restaurants and fast-food outlets is all that it takes to exceed a person's caloric requirement for the entire day. A sedentary lifestyle with little or no physical activity also leads to weight gain and obesity," adds Dr Lakdawala.

## EFFECTS

Obesity is linked to diseases like Type-2 diabetes mellitus, hypertension, dyslipidemia, coronary heart disease and stroke. Other complications include obstructive sleep apnea, gall bladder, liver and musculoskeletal disease, osteoarthritis, fertility issues and certain types of cancers. Being overweight may also delay healing of wounds and cause poor antibody response



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to hepatitis B vaccine.

Bariatrician **Dr Deepak Chaturvedi** says obesity has become a modern epidemic. "Statistics prove that death rate is 50% higher if a person is 40% overweight. Obesity is an underlying cause of many diseases, which requires prompt medical attention. For healthy weight management, appropriate nutrition and scientifically determined caloric value is required. Starvation or skipping meals may create hormonal changes that conversely contribute to obesity."

## EMOTIONAL EATING

Says Dr Agrawal, "Today's youngsters overeat to reduce their anxiety, which can be caused by trauma, social insecurity, neglect or abuse. Here's what one should keep in mind:

- All foods have calories, so avoid large servings and second helpings. Portion control is very important.
- Limit alcohol consumption.
- Don't skip meals because this can lead to overeating the next time.
- Monitor your calorie intake.
- Avoid eating while watching TV or sitting in front of a computer. Limit eating out.

## TREATMENT

Obesity can be treated with diet regulation, physical activity, medical management and, in extreme cases, bariatric surgery. "Following a healthy diet and exercising regularly is the first recommended step. Behavioural therapy helps obese people develop eating and exercise habits that enable them to decrease their weight. Pharmacological therapy may also be added to diet, exercise, and behavioural therapy. Medications are an adjunct to lifestyle modifications, not a replacement. Pharmacological therapy includes medicines that work as appetite suppressants, block digestion and absorb only one-third of the dietary fat ingested. Unfortunately, the safety and efficacy of

weight-loss medications has not been established, and discontinuation of medication usually results in regaining the weight. Bariatric surgery is a proven long-term weight loss method. It works by either causing restriction in the amount of food eaten and/or causing incomplete digestion," says Dr Lakdawala.

Obesity management is not merely weight management and hence, cannot be dealt with temporary measures. "Going to the gym and other weight-loss parlours without identifying the underlying cause is foolish. A patient needs to be interviewed in detail about his/her past, family and occupational history, interpersonal relationships and drug intake. A thorough clinical examination follows, to identify the root cause and related complications. Treatment also includes lifestyle modifications," says Dr Chaturvedi.



Keep kids away from junk food, which is a leading cause of obesity

## DID YOU KNOW?

A normal person's Body Mass Index (BMI) is usually between 18 and 25. If your BMI is in the range of 25 to 30, you are overweight. And if it exceeds 30, you are medically termed morbidly obese.