

National Obesity Week 2-8 November

Across the world the epidemic of obesity has been gathering momentum affecting both developed and developing countries. Obesity is a disease, and as a socio economic issue it has widespread ramifications, not just to health care providers but to industry, education and government.

About 2 in 5 adults in the UK are overweight and a further 1 in 5 are obese. The main causes of obesity are: overeating and/or eating the wrong kinds of foods, little physical activity; some people inherit a tendency to be obese, or a combination of these reasons.

Body mass index (BMI = kg/m²) is a measure of your body made up of fat. It relates your weight to your height. If BMI is over 25, you are overweight. If it is 30 or above you are obese.

Waist circumference is another measure. The increased health risk is greater when the fat is mainly around your waist (apple shape). As a rule, a measurement of 102 cm for men, (92cm for Asian men) and 88cm or above for women (78cm for Asian women) is a significant health risk.

Obesity can be addressed in the context of chronic disease management and waist circumference is now seen as a more accurate predictor of risk than BMI.

Some of the diseases are diabetes, high blood pressure, stroke, heart problems, some cancers, arthritis of back and legs, gallstones, menstrual problems, incontinence of urine, breathing problems and depression.

In most cases much of the health benefits come with losing the first 5-10% of your weight.

Quality of life can be improved simply by feeling better in yourself and having more energy.

The best chance of weight loss is committing to a change of lifestyle, eating a healthy diet with regular physical activity.

Ref: WHO 2000, www.who.int/topics/obesity

ALCOHOL AND YOUR HEALTH

It is estimated that up to 17 million working days are lost each year due to people missing work over the effect of alcohol.

Contrary to what many people believe, alcohol is not a stimulant, it is a depressant. This is why drinking too much often leads to impaired judgement, slurring of the speech, a tendency to violent behaviour and loss of short-term memory.

As alcohol also irritates the stomach, heavy drinking can cause sickness and nausea, and sometimes diarrhoea. Alcohol also has a dehydrating effect, which is the main reason why excessive drinking can lead to a hangover. It can also lead to temporary impotence in men.

The alcohol content of drinks is measured in 'units'. Each unit is equivalent to around 10ml or 8g of pure alcohol (ethanol). The number of units in any drink is related to the strength of the alcohol content (the concentration) and to the volume of the drink. For example, a single (35ml) shot of spirits contains roughly the same amount of alcohol as a small (125ml) glass of wine.

World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF) recommends that, if consumed at all, we limit alcoholic drinks to no more than two for men and one for women a day.

What is the link with cancer?

There is convincing evidence that alcohol increases the risk of cancer of the oesophagus, mouth, throat (pharynx and larynx), breast, as well as bowel cancer in men. It also probably increases the risk of liver cancer and bowel cancer in women.

Research shows that alcohol is particularly harmful when combined with smoking, especially for oesophageal and mouth and throat cancer.

Bowel and breast cancer are two of the most common cancers in the UK. Experts estimate that about 43% of bowel cancer and about 42% of breast cancer could be prevented by not drinking alcohol, together with having a healthy diet, being physically active and maintaining a healthy weight.

How does alcohol cause cancer?

Researchers are still looking into the reasons why alcohol may cause cancer. When our bodies break down alcohol, it can directly damage the DNA in our cells. It also produces cancer-causing compounds and raises levels of some hormones, such as oestrogen, all of which can increase cancer risk.

Tips for sensible drinking:

- Opt for the smallest serving size. Avoid double measures of spirits.
- Don't drink alcohol when you're thirsty as you're likely to consume more.
- Alternate between alcohol and soft drinks.
- Sip your drink slowly to pace yourself and make it last longer.
- Dilute alcoholic drinks or opt for low calorie/low alcohol alternatives.
- Aim to keep at least a few nights each week alcohol free.
- Avoid drinking on an empty stomach. The alcohol will be absorbed into the bloodstream more quickly.
- Make sure you are drinking water during and after consuming alcohol to rehydrate yourself.

Sources: WCRF: A closer look at: alcohol, www.drinkaware.co.uk

HEALTH AWARENESS DATES FOR THE DIARY

October 1-31	Lupus Awareness Month www.lupusuk.com	October 26-30	Indoor Allergy Week www.allergyuk.org/
1-31	Tuberous Sclerosis Awareness Month www.tuberous-sclerosis.org/	29	World Psoriasis Day www.worldpsoriasisday.com/
1-31	Breast Cancer Awareness Month www.breastcancercare.org.uk/	30	Wear it Pink www.wearitpink.co.uk
1	World Hepatitis Awareness Day www.hepctrust.org.uk/	November 1-30	Lung Cancer Awareness Month http://www.roycastle.org/
1 October -31 December	Flu Awareness Campaign http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/PublicHealth/Flu	2-8	National Obesity Week www.nof.uk.com
2	Jeans for Genes Day www.jeansforgenes.com	4	National Stress Awareness Day www.isma.org.uk/
3-9	Back Care Awareness Week www.backcare.org.uk/	9-15	Scleroderma Awareness Week www.raynauds.org.uk/
5-11	PINS Awareness Week www.pelvicinstability.otrg.uk	9-15	Threadworm Action Week www.fredworm.co.uk
8	World Sight Day www.v2020.org/	14	World Diabetes Day www.worlddiabetesday.org
10	World Mental Health Day http://www.wfmh.org/00WorldMentalHealthDay.htm	18	World COPD Day www.lunguk.org
11-17	Encephalitis Awareness Week www.encephalitis.info/	December 1	World AIDS Day www.worldaidsday.org/
12	World Arthritis Day www.worldarthritisday.org/	2	International Day of Persons with a Disability http://www.un.org/disabilities/
15	PTH at Worcestershire Business Expo www.hwchamber.co.uk/bizexpo	4	Wallace & Gromits Great British Tea Party www.wallaceandgromitfoundation.org/
20	World Osteoporosis Day www.nos.org.uk/	10	Human Rights Day www.un.org
		26 Dec – 2 Jan	Festival of Winter Walks www.ramblers.org.uk/winterwalks/

Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) survey highlights the growing value put on OH

Employers have rated the involvement of occupational health professionals as the most effective approach for managing long-term absence, and one of the most useful tools at their disposal for combating short-term absence. Return to work interviews are by some way the most highly rated approach to managing short-term absence, with almost two-thirds of respondents citing them as one of the three most effective measures.

The poll of more than 600 employees recorded a sharp decline in private sector absence but rates remained pretty static within the public sector, meaning the gap between the two had now widened from 2.6 days per employee per year to 3.3 days. The average cost of absence per employee per year is £692, which is a slight increase from the previous year's figure of £666.

CIPD advise that Line Managers should be aware of employees' performance and behaviour and not just their attendance, which might indicate that all is not well. Joint research by the CIPD, the Health & Safety Executive and Investors in People on the link between line management behaviour and stress highlights the importance of line managers having regular one-to-one conversations with their employees, regularly asking them how they are and having an interest in their lives outside work. Managers that exhibit these behaviours are more likely to know if someone is not well enough to be at work. To view the full report, go to www.cipd.co.uk

Sources: CIPD, OH Magazine September 2009