



THE WORKPLACE  
WELLBEING CHARTER  
NATIONAL AWARD for ENGLAND <sup>TM</sup>

# HEALTHY WEIGHT AND THE WORKPLACE

a guide for employers

**This Topic Guide has been commissioned and reviewed by Public Health England (PHE), but developed by Health@Work. The purpose is to provide information to help organisations of all sizes and sectors consider the value of supporting staff to have a healthy weight. The information contained in this guide is not exhaustive and is intended to provide a brief overview of the topic in order for organisations to consider their current practice. Advice and signposting links towards sources of support for those who wish to develop a strategy and enhance existing provision are also included.**

# HEALTHY WEIGHT AND THE WORKPLACE

Two thirds of the British population are overweight or obese, some of the highest rates in Western Europe.

By providing healthy eating options and promoting physical activity, businesses can play their part in supporting staff to achieve or maintain a healthy weight. This brings benefits to staff and businesses alike.

## BUSINESS BENEFITS

- On average, obese workers take four extra sick days per year.”<sup>1</sup> There is further evidence of a relationship between obesity and increased absenteeism from work for health reasons, including frequent medical appointments.<sup>2</sup> Obesity is also linked with decreased productivity.<sup>3</sup>
- Employees in good health can be three times more productive.<sup>4</sup>
- Obesity has been estimated to cost around £5 billion per year to the NHS<sup>5</sup> and £27 billion to the wider economy.<sup>6</sup>

## AREAS FOR ACTION

- Although in England obesity is not classed as a disability, its related symptoms may be if they are causing a long term impairment.<sup>7</sup> This would place a legal responsibility on employers under the terms of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Focusing on the impairments suffered by any employee as well as the cause of the impairments is important.
- The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) stated that employers may need to take special account of obese workers in job design and risk assessments.<sup>8</sup>
- As an employer, it is recommended that you take positive action to promote a healthy weight environment in your workplace.
- Businesses can create a healthy environment that makes healthy choices the norm, not just an option, such as the food offer and environmental changes such as standing desks.

# DEFINING OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY

Overweight and obesity in adults is classified using Body Mass Index (BMI). BMI is calculated by dividing an adult's weight in kilograms by the square of their height in meters.

BMI Below 18.5	This may indicate an individual is underweight.
BMI 18.5 – 24.9	This is a healthy range indicating an individual is the right weight for their height.
BMI of 25 or more	This suggests an individual is overweight, which raises their risk of health-related problems such as heart disease, type II diabetes, stroke, arthritis and some cancers. Taking steps to reduce weight is recommended.
BMI of 30 or more	This is classed as obese which further increases the risks identified above. Losing weight can reduce risks and improve health. Taking steps to reduce weight is strongly recommended.
BMI of 40 or more	This is classed as very obese which can cause significant risk of health problems. Losing weight can reduce risks and improve health. Taking steps to reduce weight is strongly recommended. <sup>9</sup>

Body Mass Index (BMI) is a strong predictor of adult mortality. People who are very obese experience a loss of life equivalent to being a lifelong smoker.<sup>10</sup> There are also physical and mental health impacts of being overweight or obese, including increased risk of:

- heart disease
- high blood pressure
- stroke
- lower back and joint pain
- type 2 diabetes
- depression
- certain cancers including breast cancer and bowel cancer.

# CAUSES OF OBESITY

When you eat and drink more calories than you burn, through physical activity and exercise, over a prolonged period of time an individual will gain weight, raising BMI and resulting in the build-up of body fat. This process is shaped by a number of factors<sup>11</sup>, including:

- the impact of biology, i.e. people's genetics and health
- the influence of the environment on an individual's food and activity behaviour
- the type, frequency and intensity of physical activities an individual carries out
- societal influences from the media, education, peer pressure or culture
- individual psychology, and an individual's preferences around food and physical activity
- food consumption patterns, including quality, quantity and frequency.

# WAYS TO SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGE WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

To promote, encourage and support employees to achieve and/or maintain a healthy weight, you can:

- Encourage staff to develop skills in making healthier meals and snacks, for example by sharing healthier recipes or running cooking courses or demonstrations for staff. The website Change for Life has Information and advice on how to eat healthily, be more active and lose weight  
[www.nhs.uk/change4life/pages/meal-planner-recipe-finder.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/change4life/pages/meal-planner-recipe-finder.aspx)
- Encourage healthy eating for example by providing healthy food in vending machines or having a subsidised fruit bowl in the office. Refer to recommendations on healthy eating in the Healthy Eating Topic Guide available from.  
[www.wellbeingcharter.org.uk](http://www.wellbeingcharter.org.uk).
- The healthier and more sustainable catering guidance includes a toolkit for serving food to adults, together with guidance and supporting tools to help caterers choose, cook and serve healthier more sustainable food and drinks. [www.gov.uk/government/publications/healthier-and-more-sustainable-catering-a-toolkit-for-serving-food-to-adults](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/healthier-and-more-sustainable-catering-a-toolkit-for-serving-food-to-adults)
- Employers can support a culture of physical activity in and around the workplace by providing information and opportunities for staff to be active on the way to work and during the day.<sup>1</sup> More detailed information on this is in the topic guide on physical activity, available from  
[www.wellbeingcharter.org.uk](http://www.wellbeingcharter.org.uk).

- Support staff with weight management, for example by providing information on local weight management services and on line support, for example the use of the NHS 12 week Weight Management Guide, [www.nhs.uk/livewell/weight-loss-guide/Pages/weight-loss-guide.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/livewell/weight-loss-guide/Pages/weight-loss-guide.aspx) which focuses on the workplace at week four and suggests that what employees eat during the working day and how they travel to work can be important factors in losing weight.<sup>12</sup>
- Consider providing in house weight management support for example from your local Public Health team, or commercial providers such as WeightWatchers, Slimming World or Counterweight .
- Consider risk assessments and reasonable adjustments for obese employees. symptoms associated with obesity may be classed as a disability and would therefore place a legal responsibility on employers under the terms of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Focusing on the impairments suffered by any employee, rather than the cause of the impairments is important.<sup>7</sup>
- Alcohol consumption can contribute to weight gain and can have a profound impact on individuals' health and wellbeing and the workplace as a whole. Consider promoting the link between alcohol and calories for example as part of supporting an alcohol awareness campaign such as Dry January. Detailed recommendations are given in the Topic Guide on Alcohol, available from. [www.wellbeingcharter.org.uk](http://www.wellbeingcharter.org.uk)

# MEASURING IMPACT

The impact of interventions to help people keep a maintain weight, and of weight management initiatives in the workplace can be evaluated in a number of different ways. These can be broadly divided into benefits for employees and benefits for the organisation.

## EMPLOYEE LEVEL

Carry out **staff surveys** to evaluate eating and physical activity habits prior to the implementation of any initiatives and then at regular intervals thereafter.

**Evaluate** the options on offer to staff and consider, for example, are healthy options available to employees? Has the balance changed to offer more opportunities to be healthy? Are healthy options the norm, or even the only options? Does the environment support staff to make healthy choices?

Offer **health checks** to staff to determine basic measures of health and fitness such as blood pressure, BMI and resting heart rate. These can be offered prior to the implementation of any initiatives and then at regular intervals thereafter.

Where physical activity or healthy eating training is provided to staff a record of attendance should be kept in order to **monitor the numbers of attendees**. If low uptake is an issue, then further action can be targeted.

## ORGANISATION LEVEL

Monitor staff **sickness absence** both before and after the introduction of any weight management initiatives. Completing return to work interviews and recording reasons for absence allows an organisation to monitor absences attributed to conditions linked with obesity. The statistics can be compared to previous levels and against the national average from sources such as CIPD Absence Management survey.

**Staff turnover** can be monitored and compared to previous levels. employee wellness programmes – like the Workplace Wellbeing Charter – have been shown to be a **cost-effective** way of improving workplace health and reducing staff sickness absence, with an estimated cost of £3 per sickness-absence day saved.<sup>13</sup>

# FURTHER SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

## **Change for Life**

Information and advice on how to eat healthily, be more active and lose weight  
[www.nhs.uk/change4life/pages/meal-planner-recipe-finder.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/change4life/pages/meal-planner-recipe-finder.aspx)

## **NICE guidelines on weight management**

Information and advice on how to provide effective multi-component lifestyle weight services for adults who are overweight or obese.  
[www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ph53](http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ph53)

## **BEAT**

Charity supporting anyone affected by eating disorders or difficulties with food, weight and shape.  
[www.b-eat.co.uk](http://www.b-eat.co.uk)

## **HOOP**

Charity that provides mutual support for obese people and links them with healthcare organisations that provide evidence based weight management services.  
[www.hoopuk.org.uk](http://www.hoopuk.org.uk)

## **NHS 12 week weight loss guide**

Revised 2015.  
[www.nhs.uk/LiveWell/weight-loss-guide/Pages/weight-loss-guide.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/LiveWell/weight-loss-guide/Pages/weight-loss-guide.aspx)

**Overcoming Obesity: An Initial Economic Analysis, McKinsey Global Institute, 2014**  
[www.mckinsey.com/insights/economic\\_studies/how\\_the\\_world\\_could\\_better\\_fight\\_obesity](http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/economic_studies/how_the_world_could_better_fight_obesity)

## **Men's Health Forum: How to make weight-loss services work for men**

[www.menshealthforum.org.uk/sites/default/files/pdf/how\\_to\\_weight\\_final\\_lr\\_1.pdf](http://www.menshealthforum.org.uk/sites/default/files/pdf/how_to_weight_final_lr_1.pdf)

For further information on evaluation of dietary, physical activity and weight management interventions, please refer to the **Standard Evaluation Frameworks** which can be accessed at

[www.noo.org.uk/core/frameworks](http://www.noo.org.uk/core/frameworks)

## **One You**

A key resource to promote adult health is the One You campaign. One You encourages people to reappraise their lifestyle choices, put themselves first and do something about their own health. Simply search One You online for a free online health quiz. There is also information and links to local sources of support to make a behaviour change.  
<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou#F3opDgKxBdb5p25L.97>





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## ABOUT THIS TOPIC GUIDE

This Topic Guide has been jointly produced between Public Health England, health@work and Liverpool City Council. The purpose of this guide is to provide information and support to help organisations of all sizes and sectors improve health in the workplace and to work towards achieving accreditation of the Workplace Wellbeing Charter.

## ABOUT THE WORKPLACE WELLBEING CHARTER

The Workplace Wellbeing Charter is an opportunity for employers to demonstrate their commitment to the health and well-being of their workforce. The positive impact that employment can have on health and wellbeing is now well documented. There is also strong evidence to show how having a healthy workforce can reduce sickness absence, lower staff turnover and boost productivity - this is good for employers, workers and the wider economy.

The Workplace Wellbeing Charter provides employers with an easy and clear guide on how to make workplaces a supportive and productive environment in which employees can flourish.

Organisations of all sizes can use the Charter standards. The Commitment level has been developed as a baseline for all businesses to achieve and acts as a useful checklist for smaller organisations to ensure legal obligations are met. The criteria for small businesses should not involve significant financial investments, and there are lots of free resources and guidance on the Charter website as well as support from your local provider.

Employers who volunteer to sign up will find help and support available through the Charter website. This will include a network of providers who can offer employers the services and advice they need to be accredited with the Charter, and help them to build the healthy workforce that business needs for the future.

[www.workplacewellbeing.org.uk](http://www.workplacewellbeing.org.uk)

## WHAT YOU CAN DO TO SUPPORT YOUR ACCREDITATION

If you are considering applying for Charter accreditation we recommend you search for a provider in your area using the Charter website [www.wellbeingcharter.org.uk](http://www.wellbeingcharter.org.uk)

Complete a self-assessment using the benchmarking tool on the website. Your local provider can offer advice and support to help with this process and advise on next steps.

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