

## FIGHTING THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE...



According to the World Health Organisation, obesity is considered to be a chronic disease. In addition the health risk associated with obesity are especially significant if the extra weight lodges itself around your waist line. This is often referred to as an apple shape. However, if you are not quite sure whether you are carrying too much weight, a good place to start is to calculate your Body Mass Index (BMI) with the following formula:

$$\text{BMI} = \text{weight (kg)} / \text{height (m)}^2$$

If you are not sure how to interpret the figure generated by this calculation, here's how:

- healthy weight = BMI 18.5-24.9 kg/m<sup>2</sup>
- overweight = BMI  $\geq$  25 kg/m<sup>2</sup>
- obese = BMI  $\geq$  30 kg/m<sup>2</sup>

The reason why curbing the inflation around your waistline is so important, is that obesity is a major risk factor for the development of for non-communicable diseases like high blood pressure, stroke, type 2 diabetes, heart diseases and certain cancers.

Apart from causing disease, an investigation into the relationship of being overweight/obese and the amount of sick leave working people take, yielded findings that in 4 out of 7 cases investigated over many years found that being overweight actually predicted taking sick leave of more than 7 days at a time.

The million dollar question is: what causes weight gain? Unfortunately the answer is not very simple, as eating more than what your body requires is only one of many factors that contribute to the development of overweight and obesity. Some of the culprits causing the battle of the bulge are referred to as

the “obesogenic environment” that we live in. This means that foods that are not good for us such as those high in fat and sugar but low in dietary fibre, are freely available at a fairly reasonable cost. In addition, time – and cost constraints, unsafe neighbourhoods, the fact that public transport is freely available and that we spend our leisure time engaged in activities that do not use up a lot of energy (such as watching TV), means that we lead a lifestyle characterised by a lack of exercise.

In addition, babies born at term with a low birth weight (less than 2.5kg) are more prone to becoming obese in adulthood. Rapid weight gain during infancy is also not a good thing as it also increases the risk of adult onset obesity. That is why all women are encouraged to only breastfeed their infants until six months of age and only start with the introduction of solid foods at this stage. Chubby teenagers are also more likely to carry that extra weight with them throughout their adult years. Overweight parents are also more likely to have offspring with weight problems. Not because of genetics, but because children tend to model their lifestyle and eating habits based on what they observe at home. This is referred to as “social inheritance”.

However, the good news is that if you have a weight problem, losing only 5-10% of your current weight can make a huge contribution to your overall health, physical and emotional wellbeing. It is also important to set yourself realistic weight loss expectations as losing more than 0.5 – 1kg/week is not realistic and rapid weight loss is associated with gaining the lost weight back. Prevention/stopping additional weight gain is also a realistic goal for those who find it especially difficult to lose weight.

The golden rules therefore are: take things slowly. Become more active by using the stairs instead of the lift, park your car at the farthest end of the parking lot at your local shopping mall. Walk instead of driving where possible. Start by eating regular meals. In other words, skipping meals is known to be the worst enemy for those trying to lose weight. Make small adjustments to that which you are currently like: spreading less margarine on your bread, cutting down on the consumption of fast foods and using less cooking oil. Small, manageable changes to your existing level of activity and eating habits is the key to a healthier future!