Study: 10 Tips for Severing Ties Between Work Conditions & Obesity

Several studies have looked at obesity and the workplace. For example, one study in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* found that obesity costs employers more than smokers. Another study showed that work-related injuries are far more costly if the injured worker is obese.

But a new study took a different approach and looked at the impact of various workplace conditions on the weight of workers.

In 'Obesity/Overweight and the Role of Working Conditions,' researchers got feedback from US workers from a variety of industries, including housekeeping/cleaning, restaurant/food service, construction, healthcare/human services and manufacturing. The workers felt the following factors impacted their weight:

- **Physically demanding work.** Having a physically demanding job often resulted in illnesses and/or injuries, influencing workers' ability to participate in physical activity outside of the job. In addition, fatigue from work played a role in the amount of food they ate at the end of the workday.
- **Psychosocial stressors.** High demands in the workplace led some workers to feel stressed and consume more high-

calorie foods, such as candy and soda. Workers also reported feelings of exhaustion, having multiple jobs and responsibilities and scheduling as elements of a heavy workload.

- **Time pressure.** Many workers reported having only 15 minutes to eat during their working hours, making it hard to prepare and eat healthy food. Female workers often discussed the interaction between work and family, specifically how the combination of responsibilities at work and at home reduced available time to engage in physical activity and eat healthy. For these workers, reliance on convenience foods was a particularly important time-saving strategy.
- **Food environment at work.** Workers reported having limited access to healthy food, due to their limited mealtime and the location of their workplace. Many workplaces don't provide workers with the appropriate equipment and space to eat meals, influencing workers' diet.

10 Tips for Employers

OHS Insider has information to help you [manage and protect overweight workers](), including

- a [quiz]() on treating workers adversely because of their weight
- a [report]() from Statistics Canada on the prevalence of obesity among adults in Canada and the US
- a [recorded webinar]() on managing overweight workers.

The study also had the following tips for employers:

Breaks and Meals

- Allow sufficient time for breaks and meals, ideally 30 minutes consecutively, as a single break.
- Support daily communication of rest and meal break times to workers to reduce anxiety about hunger and facilitate

healthy meal planning.
- Provide a clean space for eating, with sufficient functional equipment (refrigerator, microwave) for the number of workers on site.

Workload and Scheduling

- Determine physical workloads that are moderate enough to avoid excessive fatigue and risk of injury.
- Institute OHS programs that identify and reduce or eliminate ergonomic hazards. (Go to the [Ergonomics Compliance Centre](#) for resources.)
- Involve workers in scheduling decisions for shift work and overtime to promote family balance and mental health.

Other

- Encourage supportive supervisory and management styles.
- Promote programs that identify and eliminate bullying and sexual harassment.
- Select third party service contractors that address working conditions and are sensitive to the needs of low-wage workers.
- Establish worker-management committees that incorporate health, safety and wellness.

At [Safety Smart](#), you can download a [safety talk on winning the war on weight](#) and an [article on obesity and workplace safety](#). Not a subscriber to SafetySmart' Sign up for a [free trial](#).