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Nutrition and Obesity e-book

**The Latest Standards and Implications
in the Health and Fitness Industry in the
Current Climate**

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Introduction

Today, the United Kingdom has an obesity rate of 28.7% and a further 35.6% of adults are overweight, according to the Body Mass Index (BMI) (House of Commons Library, 2019). The UK is evidently in an obesity crisis, which seems to have had an abundance of attention in the media in recent years. Furthermore, due to the outbreak of Coronavirus, the governments' attention has turned to introduce a plan to 'tackle the crisis'.

While the issue is not new, the levels of obesity in the UK have become incrementally worse over the past few decades. Is a rise in 'junk' food to blame? Have we as a nation become too sedentary? How much responsibility should be put on the government to resolve the problem? This e-book aims to set out the latest research, while providing applicable lifestyle changes for the average individual.

Body Mass Index (BMI) – A measure that uses an adult's weight in kilograms divided by their height in metres squared. The NHS state that the healthy weight range is between 18.5 and 24.9. Calculate your BMI using the [online calculator](#).

Obesity – a condition in which excessive fat is carried in the adipose tissue, measured using BMI or waist circumference. The BMI for obesity is 30 upwards. The waist circumference of a health adult should be below 94cm for men and 80cm for women.



What Causes Weight Gain and Obesity?

Obesity is the cause of consuming too much food and not being active enough. For a human being to gain weight, at any age, they have to simply be taking in more energy than they are expending, which is known as a calorie surplus.

Almost two thirds of adults are classed as obese, figures which have been on the rise since the early 1990s (Triggle, 2020). Statistics have also found that generally, men are slightly more obese than women, and obesity levels are at their highest between the age range of mid-50s to mid-60s (Health Survey for England, 2018). Comparatively, the US obesity levels are around 40%, around 28% in the UK and less than 10% in South Korea and Japan (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020).

Genetics and societal influence both play a role in attitudes' and behaviours' and, increased exposure to unhealthy food will likely increase food intake and calories, thus leading to weight gain, if the energy expenditure (exercise and movement) doesn't match this.

Calorie Surplus – when the number of calories consumed is higher than the number of calories burned, leading to an increase in body mass (weight gain)

Calorie Deficit – when the number of calories consumed is less than the number of calories burned, leading to decrease in body mass (weight loss)



The Role of External Factors on Weight

As mentioned previously, there are other factors that can influence weight gain or weight loss. One of the most significant factors is our surroundings and exposures. Interestingly, one of the drivers of childhood obesity in the UK is overweight parents. The Health Survey for England 2017 monitored the trends in the nation's health, surveying 8,000 adults and 2,000 children. The results signified that 28% of children with an obese mother were also obese, while 8% of obese children's mothers were of a healthy weight. Similarly, 24% of children with an obese father were also obese, compared to 9% of obese children's fathers were of a healthy weight (Health Survey for England, 2017).

Other things to be considered are genetics, however, this can sometimes be used as an excuse. The impact of genes on obesity are not significant enough to be the sole blame. Evidence does suggest that genetics can increase susceptibility of obesity, however, this is generally mainly based around behaviours around food and exercise (Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015).

Attitudes and behaviours of individuals are huge contributors to weight gain or weight loss. Healthy habits generally lead to a healthy individual, as they are living a healthy lifestyle. A good example of this is escalators vs stairs. Often, people will stand still on an escalator and wait to reach the top, therefore, they aren't expending any energy. One simple healthy habit would be to take the stairs, or if there isn't any available, actively choosing to walk up the escalator will burn around 20 calories. During the day, this can quickly amount up to an extra 100+ calories (Very Well Fit, 2019).



Government Regulations

In recent years, there has been a rising pressure of the governmental bodies to act in England in order to try and tackle obesity. Particularly after the Coronavirus outbreak, science has demonstrated how the virus will cause more detriment to those who carry

excess body fat. As a response, the UK government have implemented a 'Better Health' campaign, in attempt to encourage overweight individuals to shift excess weight.

Post-Coronavirus Economic Rebuild

A clear conflict of interest has arisen here, as the economy is deteriorating, the government are attempting to introduce strategies to help salvage businesses in the UK. During the summer, from 3-31 August 2020, the government have devised the 'Eat Out to Help Out' scheme, launching in participating restaurants. This will enable a 50% discount on food and non-alcoholic drinks (with up to £10 maximum discount per person), on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. This will be valid in any restaurants, bars, cafes, pubs, canteens and food halls who sign up to the scheme (Gov.uk, 2020).

The motives behind this decision are to help the recovery of the economy due to the damage caused since March 2020 when Covid-19 really hit the United Kingdom. Furthermore, VAT will be cut from 20% to 5% on food, attractions and accommodation until 12 January 2021, with aims to protect the tourism and hospitality sector (Ledsom, 2020).

Government to Tackle Obesity

Boris Johnson has decided to further boost the message of the obesity issues in the UK with the new scheme promoting better health. The decision has come after a connection between obesity and an increased risk from Coronavirus has been proven (BBC, 2020).

The action steps include a ban on advertising unhealthy foods before 9pm, both online and on the TV. Supermarket and restaurant offerings, such as 'buy one get one free' will be abolished. Moreover, supermarkets will be limited as to where they can display foods high in fat, sugar, and salt, in attempt to promote better, 'healthier' choices. Calorie labelling will be obligatory to display on menus, possibly including alcohol, however, only if the company employs over 250 people. There is due to be an expansion of weight management services offered by the NHS, including the promotion of GPs to prescribe exercise to their patients (Gov.uk Department of Health and Social Care, 2020).

Obesity Trends by Region

One of the major issues with the current schemes in place is the contradictory nature of them. From one stance, the government are attempting to encourage the nation to eat out and spend money in any food chain, through the enticement tactics of discounted prices. However, in opposition to this, the prime minister is bringing the obesity issues the country faces to light and wants this to be solved.

The statistics on obesity are evident that those from working class backgrounds and those with lower household incomes, have higher rates of obesity. Deprivation and being overweight are linked, as these individuals may lack the funds to buy healthy, fresh food or to pay for gym memberships. These individuals also may not have the knowledge and understanding around nutrition and health, as they are not exposed to it. National data suggests that in counties with higher wealth are less likely to need medical attention for obesity-related issues. Whereas, in more deprived areas, such as Cornwall and Stoke-on-Trent, they are two thirds more likely to be admitted to hospital with obesity being an issue (Triggle, 2020).

This is indicative that the issues lie amongst those with less economic advantage. They are likely to invest in their health and wellbeing less than those with a large disposable income.

These individuals are also ones who will take advantage of the incentive running in August, if they can save 50% per head in a fast food chain, this could be a big saving for a large family for their weekly treat.



The Health and Fitness Industry

People are becoming more health conscious, particularly if they have the exposure to fit and healthy 'influencers' online. In the UK, the annual turnover of fitness facilities is 2 billion pounds per year, a figure which has grown from 6.8 million in 2008 (Statista, 2019). Moreover, market itself is worth 5 billion (Consultancy UK, 2019).

Body Positivity Movements

In the social media age, there has been a rise of promotion of body image and 'normality' across the media. In 2020, newspaper outlets still negatively comment on the weight of a celebrity, point out their cellulite or draw attention to their stomach when they are sitting down. Body positivity is a movement which promotes the acceptance of all bodies, regardless of size, race, gender, appearance or physical capability. In 2020, Instagram and other social media platforms have become better at the acceptance of this, while influencers continue the promotion of exercise.

Health Benefits of Exercise

While many still consider exercise as a chore and an aid to weight loss, there are so many other factors which explain why it should be part of everyone's daily routine. Mental health can be hugely altered with something as simple as a short walk and being amongst nature is very under-rated. The NHS are going to be more prescriptive when a patient needs to lose weight, which is a great starting point to create a healthier nation.

Exercising regularly has huge implications on overall health, including decreasing risk to cardiovascular disease, boosting mental health, improving heart health and according to the NHS, can lower risk of a premature death by 30% (NHS, 2020).

Exercise Programmes, Apps and Smartwatches

As we have become more reliant upon technology, today, there is an app or online programme to help with almost anything. When it comes to health and fitness, these are great. An app with motivational notifications, or a nudge on the wrist as a reminder to get moving could see a huge shift in the UK's mindset towards exercise.

The Rise of the Smartwatch

In the UK, smartwatches, such as the flashy Apple Watch, hefty-priced Garmin or more run-of-the-mill Fitbit, have become mainstream. It is not uncommon to see the average Brit now wearing one of these watches in place of their designer 'fashion' one. As a nation, 32.1% wore a smartwatch in 2019, aged between 18-64 (Statista, 2020). Interestingly, millennials

topped the statistics, with 37.6% of them wearing a smartwatch, while just over 22% of Baby Boomers reported to use one.

These health trackers are a great and affordable way to track data, such as step count and exercise. For the average individual, hitting 10,000 steps a day will have a positive impact on health, particularly as this opposes to the sedentary lifestyle that many in the UK follow.

Exercise Programmes and Apps

During the Coronavirus pandemic, the UK had a surge in downloads of the NHS backed app, Couch to 5K. The app is designed to help anyone who has not run before, or who cannot run, to run 5 kilometres non-stop, in 9 weeks. Between March and June 2020, 858,000 people downloaded the app, a 92% increase from the same period in the year prior (BBC, 2020). If the health service is able to encourage the use of this app long-term, many more will find a love for running, a great cardiovascular activity which promotes good lung health.

Moreover, during the lockdown periods, many gyms and personal trainers took to online group exercise classes, including at home HIIT sessions, Tabata workouts and yoga classes. One of the many benefits that came out of this rise in online exercise was that for many who failed to find the time to move before, were able to restructure their routine to fit in some daily exercise. One company, Les Mills, a global market leader saw a 900% increase in online clients worldwide during the lockdown (ITV, 2020). Furthermore, for many gym-lovers, they were able to train and increase their heart rate from the comfort of their own home.

HIIT – high intensity interval training

Tabata – advanced, intense interval training

Yoga – a Hindu spiritual practice, including meditation, deep breathing techniques and various body postures and movements



Re-opening of Gyms and Fitness Centres

On 25th July 2020, gyms and fitness centres in the UK were given permission by the government to reopen. The majority of gyms have now reopened, with limited capacity to allow for increased cleaning and social distancing inside the gym. Economically, this will have a great effect, as revenue streams will steadily begin to increase again for these businesses.

The re-opening of fitness centres aligns with the government's new strategy, 'Better Health', as more people will have access to gym equipment. Beyond the machines and weights on a gym floor, there is a social aspect to attending the gym. Many can attend classes, meet up with friends or find time to have a post-workout coffee, all of which will further benefit the mental health in the UK. Over time, as people become more confident in returning to

normal-life, gym attendance is likely to increase and the industry should do well in the long-term.

Conclusion

It is without a doubt that 2020 has been a very unexpected year. The rise of Coronavirus cases and susceptibility to catching it has been a huge wake-up call to many, including Boris Johnson. Overall, this has spurred on the motivation to attempt to tackle the obesity problems the UK faces. In the years to come, the nation should take steps in a positive direction, and the statistics around the disease should decrease.



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