OBESITY AFFECTS PRODUCTIVITY

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OBESITY is a global health concern. The numbers have tripled worldwide since 1975 with nearly 800 million obese people today. Obesity is defined as the excessive accumulation of body fat causing an increase in weight. It has been recognised as a preventable nutritional disease that affects high- and middleincome countries.



Obesity may lead to adverse health conditions, including diabetes, high blood pressure or cardiovascular diseases like stroke and heart attack.

Obesity in adults results in indirect economic losses at workplace. Particularly, absenteeism and presenteeism are commonly used in the occupational settings to assess workplace productivity loss.

Absenteeism is defined as an employee having an unscheduled absence from work, whereas presenteeism (or better known as working while sick) is defined as an employee who is present but not fully productive.

Extremely obese workers are generally less productive than non-obese workers as they face more limitations. They spend a longer time completing tasks or are not able to cope with physical job demands.

A study conducted in the United

States showed that about four per cent of health-related loss in productivity was prevalent in obese individuals, which translated into an additional loss of US$506 per worker annually.

In Malaysia, 4.53 per cent of the gross domestic product in 2015 was attributed to absenteeism and presenteeism. Absenteeism is easier to be quantified via sick leave.

It has been shown that there is an increase in absenteeism of one to two days annually for obese American workers compared with those with normal weight.

Similarly, in Malaysia, a significant economic burden will be incurred by employers if workers were absent from work due to obesity-related health incidents.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, it is important to be aware that obesity poses higher risks of severe symptoms and hospitalisation if people were to contract the virus.

Notably, being obese is also linked to an increased risk of developing long Covid syndrome, which is characterised by non-specific symptoms postinfection.

In addition, socio-economically disadvantaged workers are more likely to practise a sedentary lifestyle during the pandemic and exhibit a higher rate of presenteeism.

Those who work from home may indirectly have an increased risk of obesity (secondary to reduced mobility and easier access to food or drinks at home without the need to go out).

As such, the pandemic has in a way triggered obesity and presenteeism.

In line with World Obesity Day 2022's theme of "Everybody needs to act", which is observed early next month, we need to address obesity as a disease and aim to achieve a body mass index value of 18.5 to 23.9 kg/m2.

Therefore, we should start leading a healthy lifestyle by quitting smoking, reducing alcohol consumption, getting enough sleep (between seven and nine hours per night), eating enough fruits or vegetables (at least five servings per day) and exercising regularly (with moderate-intensity aerobic activity for at least 150 minutes per week).