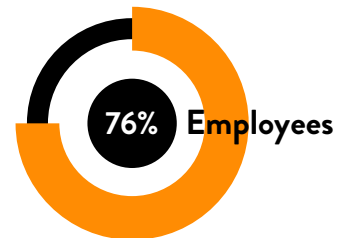




Solving India Inc.'s Lifestyle Disease Epidemic

Lifestyle diseases have entered the Indian office. These diseases, caused by poor diet and lack of exercise, are making an uphill climb. However, Indian employees seem to be brushing off the threat of lifestyle diseases as **76% of employees denied that they can fall prey to diabetes, heart diseases, cancer, or stroke.**¹



According to a study, **six out of ten executives in India are overweight.** This is attributed to unhealthy habits like intake of junk food, a sedentary lifestyle topped with long working hours.² Productivity in corporates also takes a hit because of the poor lifestyle choices of employees. For instance, Bengaluru's IT industry loses **INR 24,000 crore a year due to poor health and lifestyle habits** of the employees.³

Lifestyle diseases are those whose occurrence is based on the daily habits of people and are a result of an inappropriate relationship of people with their environment. The main factors include poor food habits, physical inactivity, wrong body posture, and disturbed biological clock.⁴ Some examples of lifestyle diseases include obesity, type 2 diabetes, hypertension and heart diseases.

Here are four important things to remember about lifestyle diseases.

4

There is no quick-fix for lifestyle diseases:

These illnesses are serious and changing behaviours require major lifestyle changes for good health outcomes. Case in point, if a Type 2 Diabetic refuses to keep sugar levels under control, be physically active and follow a diabetic friendly diet, it can lead to complications like heart disease, glaucoma, kidney diseases, etc.

These diseases need to be self-managed:

Managing lifestyle diseases boils down to the decisions that the patient makes. Whether they decide to binge on sweets or eat in moderation, take the lift or take the stairs; every small health habit has a big impact.

There is no perfect treatment:

Individual differences need to be accounted for while making a treatment plan. For instance, a senior citizen with knee issues might find it difficult to incorporate exercise into their daily routine. However, they might be able to accommodate diet changes.

Change takes time:

The path from getting diagnosed with a lifestyle disease to managing it successfully is a difficult one. This might lead one to believe that it is impossible to change behaviours required to become healthy. Patients need to understand that they are in it for the long haul. It's important to stay disciplined and motivated to achieve the goal of healthy living.

Companies in India are taking the lead in healthy office initiatives through corporate wellness programs.⁵ In order to improve health indices for employees at risk of lifestyle diseases at the workplace, it is essential to create awareness for preventive measures at the right time.

Companies need to focus not just on fitness and diet but provide guidance for those at risk of developing lifestyle diseases. Thus, a disease management program aimed specifically at the management of health conditions for Corporate India is the need of the hour.



Disease Management Program at the Workplace

Disease management programs are structured treatment plans that aim to help people better manage their chronic disease and to maintain and improve the quality of life.⁴ The goals of this program are to enhance the patients' health and quality of life and reduce the need for hospitalization in order to lower health care spend. Employers can add Disease Management to an already existing corporate wellness program.

The components of Disease Management that can be integrated into a Corporate Wellness Program are:

Getting Guidance: Employees who fall in the moderate to high risk for lifestyle diseases need expert guidance from health care professionals. The precursor to this would be getting a health screening done and filling a health assessment so that the health professional can set the tone for the way forward.

Setting Goals: When an at-risk employee focuses on their own health goals, it can help keep them on track for optimum wellness.⁶ When it comes to changing habits, it could help to start with smaller goals and move on to big ones. For example, if the employee is a smoker, he or she can keep a goal of reducing smoke breaks. Once the employee achieves this, he/she can try going without smoking for a week, then a month, then a year.

Tracking Progress: Once the employee has set goals, the next step is to measure the progress. This helps keep an eye on how far the employee has come. It also validates if the program has successfully helped make a difference in employee lives. Tracking also helps collect health data about the individual, which could be useful during visits to a health professional.

Staying Motivated: The phrase “old habits die hard” is true when it comes to unhealthy habits. Since bad habits such as eating junk food and smoking trigger the pleasure chemical in our brain, they are difficult to get rid of.⁷ Employees can stay motivated by thinking of the end reward, i.e., good health outcomes.



Success of Disease Management Programs

Programs that assist patients in managing their lifestyle diseases on a regular basis have seen success.

Case in point, a study⁹ on diabetes intervention which aimed to explore and compare cost-effectiveness of lifestyle interventions for individuals at different levels of diabetes risk showed this result: —————→

One new case of diabetes per 20 years was prevented for every 7–30 participants.

Here, healthcare intervention refers to an intensive lifestyle intervention with a duration of 3 years, focusing on diet and exercise, for adults with moderate risks of developing diabetes (obese adults 30–70 years), implemented in a health care setting, referred to as “health care intervention.”

Another study that also outlines the success of Disease Management is as follows. The Wellness Programs Study, which included almost 600,000 employees at seven different employer organizations, shows that the two programs combined reduced an employer’s average healthcare cost by approximately over INR 2000 (\$37) per member per month, but that **disease management accounted for 87% of those savings.**¹⁰



To sum up, effective strategies are required to address the rise in lifestyle diseases in corporate India. These need to be tailored to the individual needs of the employees. This would be beneficial to the workforce as well as the bottomline of the company.

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