

Medical studies describe it as body fat which can hurt a person's health. India and China have the highest number of obese children in the world. If on the one hand, we see an alarming spike in obesity levels in developing countries, on the other, we have a growing obsession with body image. Hence, how we look matters a great deal.

India's Gotta Big Fat Problem!

Research has shown that Indians figure high on the obesity chart. There is also higher prevalence of central obesity in Indians as compared to Caucasians.

The next time you stand on the weighing scale to check your weight, don't forget to pull out the measuring tape and check your bulging waistline as well. We all know that tummy consciousness cuts across nations and classes. It's no secret that a protruding tummy is often considered a social embarrassment. However, a majority of men in Indian households see it as a sign of prosperity and marital bliss.

A new study published in the journal *Frontiers in Public Health* suggests that the number of people who fall into the "overfat" category in the top 30 industrialised countries, are more than all of the obese and overweight people in the world. In fact, the journal's findings claim that an estimated 90 per cent of the men and 50 per cent of the children in the US, New Zealand, Greece and Iceland are overfat. Researchers found that 80 per cent of the women in these countries were overfat too.

"Overfat" is a term used to describe body fat levels that can actually imbalance a person's health. People with "normal weight" or "non-obese" by traditional standards, too, can fall in the overfat category, which consists typically of people who have the proverbial beer belly or potbelly, but are otherwise in decent shape.

In fact, abdominal fat is one of the most dangerous kinds of fat one can have. Unlike your love handles — the pinchable fat right beneath your skin — abdominal fat is in your stomach area and grows deep inside your body. It wraps around your vital organs. Your liver borrows this fat and turns it into cholesterol that can sneak into your arteries. If your arteries start to harden, this can lead to a heart attack or stroke.

In the past, several technologies were used to tackle obesity, each promising obesity control and fat control in a short span of time. As to how effective they were, and the hidden dangers, it is anybody's guess.

Being overweight imperils your health in many ways. But what is not so commonly known is that one of the main fallouts of obesity is skin ailments, which people mostly neglect to treat. Besides the elevated risks for heart disease, diabetes and certain types of cancer, excess weight also adversely impacts the health and appearance of your skin. The body that carries too much weight can lead to insulin resistance. When this happens, darkened, velvety patches called acanthosis nigricans can form, especially in areas where the skin folds and overlaps like the knees, elbows, groin, armpits, underarms and neck, even prominent marks on the face. Weight loss can improve the appearance of acanthosis nigricans.

Obesity can lead to extremely dry skin and impaired wound healing. Incidence of acne or pimples, pigmentation problems like melasma and hirsutism is high in obese patients, especially in females who have associated polycystic ovarian disease because of hormonal imbalance, again due to obesity.



DR DEBRAJ SHOME

Stretch marks are another area of concern as they are extremely difficult to remove, even with the latest lasers and technologies available to us. Fungal infections as well as chronic skin diseases like psoriasis and venous leg ulcers are high in overfat individuals.

Research has shown that Indians figure high on the obesity chart and have some of the highest rates of diabetes. In fact, there is a higher prevalence of central obesity in Indians as compared to Caucasians. Globally among children under five years of age, at least 41 million were found to be obese or overweight in 2014. The WHO report suggests it is rising at a frenetic pace in all developing countries. Between 1990 and 2014, the number of overweight children had more than doubled from 7.5 million to 15.5 million. In 2014, almost half (46%) of all overweight and obese children under 5 years age lived in Asia, and one-quarter (25%) in Africa. Technology today is often used as a band-aid solution for tackling problems. But there is a lack of awareness among people about the latest technologies. Blaming inactivity on technology is an excuse to ignore personal responsibility. Today there are wonderful technologies that can be used to encourage physical activity and prevent obesity. But most importantly, technology can help boost low confidence and improve body image issues, which could lead to many other physical and mental problems.

(Dr Debraj Shome is a prominent Mumbai-based facial plastic surgeon and director, The Esthetic Clinics, India)

OBESITY & SKIN DISORDERS

DARKENED, VELVETY PATCHES CALLED ACANTHOSIS NIGRICANS CAN FORM IN AREAS WHERE THE SKIN FOLDS AND OVERLAPS LIKE THE KNEES, ELBOWS, GROIN, ARMPITS, UNDERARMS AND NECK. SOMETIME PROMINENT MARKS ON FACE TOO. GREY, BROWN OR BLACK PATCHES MAY APPEAR.

EXTREMELY DRY SKIN AND IMPAIRED WOUND HEALING.

ACNE OR PIMPLES, PIGMENTATION PROBLEMS LIKE MELASMA AND HIRSUTISM.

STRETCH MARKS

FUNGAL INFECTIONS AS WELL AS CHRONIC SKIN DISEASES LIKE PSORIASIS AND VENOUS LEG ULCERS ARE MORE COMMON IN OVERFAT INDIVIDUALS.

CHEW THE FAT

IN 2014 48% OF ALL OVERWEIGHT and obese children in the world under 5 years of age lived in Asia, and 25% in Africa.

CHINA AND INDIA HAVE THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF OBESE CHILDREN.

90% MEN 80% WOMEN 50% CHILDREN

IN THE U.S., NEW ZEALAND, GREECE AND ICELAND ARE OVERFAT.

NUMBER OF OVERWEIGHT CHILDREN IN LOW AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES HAS DOUBLED

7.5 MILLION 1990

15.5 MILLION 2014

APART FROM INCREASING THE RISKS FOR HEART DISEASE, DIABETES AND CERTAIN TYPES OF CANCER, OBESITY CAN LEAD TO EXTREMELY DRY SKIN AND IMPAIRED WOUND HEALING.

● CHINA AND THE US HAVE THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF OBESE ADULTS.

● CHINA AND INDIA HAVE THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF OBESE CHILDREN.

APPROXIMATELY 3.4 mn

ADULTS SUCCUMB EACH YEAR TO OBESITY AND RELATED DISEASES.

OBESITY IS INCREASING AT ALMOST DOUBLE THE RATE IN THE PAST 20 YEARS.

WEIGHT WATCH

● OBESITY IS MEASURED BY BODY MASS INDEX (BMI). PEOPLE ARE CONSIDERED OBESE WHEN THEIR BMI, A MEASUREMENT OBTAINED BY DIVIDING A PERSON'S WEIGHT BY THE SQUARE OF THE PERSON'S HEIGHT, IS OVER 30 KG/M², WITH THE RANGE 25-30 KG/M² DEFINED AS OVERWEIGHT.

Ponder Over Potbelly



DR JAYA GOYAL

A protruding belly was a sign of prosperity and power, but today it is a social embarrassment across nations and classes.

If you think Pot-Wheat-Pear-Beer is an exotic cocktail, you are likely to be a man! These are types of bellies, often used in the context of men. For women, there are many other areas of their bodies to be concerned about. Lately, men seem to be embarrassed about their increasing waistlines and are attempting to become flat and fit. But this male embarrassment and guilt at the big belly is a recent phenomenon. A protruding belly was once acceptable, if not a matter of pride.

Bollywood is witness to this claim. There is no dearth of examples in the history of Hindi cinema. A lead actor with his young son, showing-off his rounded physique above stripped *kachha* trunks, singing *Thande thande pani se nahan chahiye*, was a hit in the '70s! One could argue that Sanjeev Kumar's acting prowess was belittled by his belly. On the contrary, the belly was part of being desirable. Actors from the Kapoor clan, including the legendary Raj Kapoor in *Mera Naam Joker*, or Rishi Kapoor in *Chandni*, charmed audiences in spite of their paunches. A protruding belly was a symbol of prosperity and power. Flat abs were not desirable in the industry then.

Then how come in the last decade or so, shame rather than pride is the emotion associated with large male bellies? Pride at having a big belly has been replaced by the six-packs of the metrosexual male. What factors steered this change?

Reasons are largely structural and social. First, obesity, which was once a sign of wealth and prosperity, became more pervasive among the urban and even rural middle class due to the rapid transformation from an agrarian to an urban society. Rising income levels and sedentary lifestyles played their part too in this equalising process.

Then, the affluent began cutting visceral flab with the resources at their disposal like dieticians, gyms, slimming and beauty centres and medical technology, all of which became booming industries in early 2000.

Increasingly, the beauty-fitness-medical industry was targeting men. Ads showing before-after images of large-bellied men changing into Greek gods were compulsively convincing. The supply-side was ready.

I argue that the demand among men for slimming is essentially fuelled by changing relationship dynamics between the genders.

More women in the work force during and post liberalisation meant not only financial independence but also a part in decision making. Also, pro-women legislations in the last decade challenged the patriarchal hegemony of Indian society. Legislation such as the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act 2005, ensuring equal rights for daughters in their parental property; the Domestic Violence Act, 2005; the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 and the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act 2017, are game-changers in giving women the negotiating power in various relationships they had with men in their eco system. A recent advertisement of an international washing machine brand is a testimony to this. A wife wittily tells her oversized but exercising husband that if anything was going out of shape, it was not his expensive shirt! She insists he keep cycling ruthlessly dismissing him for working out for six months while he solaces his gigantic tummy! The assertiveness and aspirations of women about a fitter body has spilled over to the men — husband, son and boyfriend!

Male celebrities that did an image make-over by shedding excess bulges and belly, like the singer Adnan Sami, business czar-in-the-making Anant Ambani and Maharashtra's Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis, have one thing in common — a woman — wife or mother — who walked the talk herself. Roya Faryabi, Neeta Ambani and Amruta Fadnis' oomph factor motivated their menfolk to transform. Men are now playing alongside women in getting in shape. When relationships were unequal and weighted towards men, bellies flourished, but assertive women are no longer willing to put up with ugly flab in their menfolk.

Men have much to gain and little to lose in the deal, other than loose pants and losing their bellies.

(Dr Jaya Goyal is a social scientist with a PhD in Social Science. She has worked and written on public policy on health, nutrition, outcome budgeting, social audits and caste reservations in higher education.)

HEAVY DUTY AFFAIR

● THE LATEST NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF MEDICINE STATES THAT IN

2015 **603.7** & **107.7**
MN | ADULTS MN | CHILDREN

● HIGH BMI CAUSES LEUKEMIA AND SEVERAL TYPES OF CANCER, INCLUDING CANCERS OF THE ESOPHAGUS, LIVER, BREAST, UTERUS, OVARY, KIDNEY AND THYROID.