

## **The magnitude of the problem – the global epidemic of obesity**

The obesity update report got published in the prestigious New England Journal of Medicine in the year 2017. It warned that the obesity epidemic is getting worse globally, affecting both the developed and the developing world. The United States and Mexico lead the world in the prevalence of obesity, with an incidence of 38% followed by Europe at about 30%. The prevalence of obesity in India has been rising steadily since 1980. That is the result of affluence, as millions of people got lifted out of poverty into the middle class. Obesity is a fast-growing epidemic amongst city children in India. At one end of the spectrum, 40% of Indian children are malnourished, and at the other end, 30% of the children in the cities are obese or overweight. Urban India is fast moving from the state of being underfed to the state of being overfed.

The city dwellers are increasingly adopting unhealthy, obesogenic, packaged and pre-prepared fast foods and sugary beverages. The eating opportunities have increased from traditional 2-3 meals per day to 6-7 meals per day. These multiple meals and snacks are consumed continuously going into the late-night hours. Added to this insult is the sedentary jobs and lifestyles, brought about by automobile, hired affordable house help, home entertainments such as video games, television, and digital social media. All that has contributed to the rising incidence of obesity in India, which now matches the western world. The prevalence of obesity in India currently stands at:

- Females – 35%
- Males – 28.5%
- Abdominal obesity (larger waist circumference) – 41%
- Morbid obesity (more than twice the ideal body weight) – 5% and fast growing.

Indians have a genetic tendency to abdominal obesity because of a smaller muscle mass. The abdominal obesity (big belly), carries a much higher risk of Type 2 diabetes and heart disease when compared to weight-related obesity. Unfortunately, a big belly is the fastest growing epidemic amongst Indian city dwellers over the age of 40 years.

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Some important facts about obesity:

- \* Obesity rates are higher amongst women than amongst men.
- \* Highest obesity rates are between the age of 60 – 65 years in women and 50 – 54 years in men.
- \* Obesity rates are rising faster amongst children than amongst adults.
- \* Since 1980's the obesity rates, have doubled in the world population, and the incidence keeps growing. That can be attributed both to a change in the food from natural to synthetic foods, as well as to a significant change in mealtime opportunities from 2 – 3 meals per day to 6 – 7 meals and snacks per day.
- \* Countries with the lowest obesity rates are Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, with an incidence of 2 – 4%. Preserving the traditional cultures in foods and lifestyles may be the reason for this low incidence of obesity.
- \* Most adults with obesity are in India and China as these countries have the largest population in the world. City dwellers in both these countries have adopted western fast food culture as well as the sedentary lifestyles, rapidly over the past 30 – 40 years. That has contributed to twin epidemics – obesity + diabetes = Diabetesity.
- \* Obesity by far is the most lethal and most costly afflictions of modern societies around the world. Obesity is the mother of all modern diseases and is the primary cause of the disease and disability.

