

78 percent of hospital workers in Houston are overweight or obese

January 30 2017

Seventy-eight percent of employees at Houston hospitals are overweight or obese, according to a study by researchers at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (UTHealth) School of Public Health. The research results were published recently in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*.

Employees from six hospitals across Houston, with the exception of physicians, were invited to participate in a survey about their health status and diet in 2012. A total of 924 employees responded to the survey, most of whom classified themselves as hospital administrators or technicians.

"Seventy-eight percent is higher than the national average but not shocking because our study probably attracted employees who wanted to lose weight. Regardless, it is troubling because these are hospital employees active in the workforce and we need them to be healthy. Because obesity is linked to so many cardiometabolic risks, such as elevated glucose and lipids, this calls for immediate intervention to prevent chronic diseases," said Shreela Sharma, Ph.D., R.D., first author on the paper and associate professor in the Department of Epidemiology, Human Genetics and Environmental Sciences at UTHealth School of Public Health.

According to the results, there was no significant difference in the intake of fruits and vegetables among normal weight, overweight and obese participants, which was generally low across all groups. However, as

compared to those of [normal weight](#), obese participants had significantly higher daily consumption of white potatoes such as French fries, regular fat foods (versus reduced or low fat), sugary beverages and added butter and margarine.

Overall, most participants in the study led a sedentary lifestyle. Sixty-five percent of participants reported no days of [vigorous physical activity](#) and 48 percent reported no days of [moderate physical activity](#). However, overweight and obese participants spent more time on sedentary behaviors such as watching television. Obese participants also spent more time playing computer games and sitting during the week and on weekends.

"It's not just about what you don't do or don't eat. Behaviors have an additive effect - obesity can happen not just because you didn't eat enough fruits and vegetables, but because you also ate more fried foods and foods that are higher in fat; and not just because you weren't very active, but also because you were sedentary more often," said Sharma, who is also a faculty member with the Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living at the School of Public Health.

Hospital workers are part of a group that suffers from what Sharma calls "the nurturer effect."

"People who take care of others on a regular basis are generally less likely to take care of themselves. The focus of hospitals is on patient care so sometimes the workers' own care can take a back seat," said Sharma.

Nearly 79 percent of survey participants were dissatisfied with their worksite wellness programs and dissatisfaction was highest among obese participants. Given that employees are spending a majority of their waking hours at work, Sharma recommends further investment in

worksite-based strategies to promote [physical activity](#) and healthy eating, such as healthy vending machine options and accessible walking paths.

"These results highlight the need for hospital employers to better understand, support and nurture the health of their employees," said Sharma, who added that the local hospitals are interested and invested in employee wellness.

Provided by University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston

Citation: 78 percent of hospital workers in Houston are overweight or obese (2017, January 30) retrieved 5 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-01-percent-hospital-workers-houston-overweight.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--