

What Ails India Inc's Executives?

Anecdotal evidence suggests, surveys confirm: the Indian corporate executive – putting in long hours and leading a sedentary life – is at acute medical risk. **Labonita Ghosh** gives the lowdown on seven medical conditions that are afflicting increasing numbers in India Inc, who is typically under risk and what they can do to combat it

Orthopaedic Injuries

WHAT ARE THEY?

Musculo-skeletal disorders, caused by overuse of certain muscles, joints, tendons, nerves and ligaments. Among office-goers, these include lower back, neck and shoulder pain from sitting hunched before a computer; carpal tunnel syndrome, which is numbness and pain in the finger joints, from texting. "When you sit at the computer, you may be pushing your neck forward to see better," says orthopaedic surgeon Dr Nirad Vengsarkar. "This can create severe neck and upper-back pain, while prolonged sitting can cause lower-back problems."

WHO DO THEY AFFECT?

Analysts, accountants and anyone who needs to sit at a computer for hours; sales and marketing people who roam around with heavy bags; factory workers who do heavy lifting, repetitive bending and staying hunched over the assembly line for long. Even supervisors, if they have a 'bad' walk, can throw their back out of gear since their work involves walking for long stretches.

TIPS TO COMBAT THIS

TAKE FREQUENT breaks. "If you're sitting at the computer, stand up every 15-20 minutes or look around," he says. "Do some simple stretches for your neck, back and shoulder blades. That one-minute break can eventually make you more productive," says Dr Vengsarkar.

CONVINCE YOUR office to get more ergonomic furniture. More companies are now beginning to pay attention to this.

STAY ACTIVE. Keep your body weight in check.

Heart Disease

WHAT IS IT?

Heart attacks are common in the corporate world, the usual victims being between 45 and 55 years. Increasingly, the 28-35 group is becoming more susceptible to risks relating to blocked arteries, high cholesterol and other cardiovascular diseases. A 35-year-old MD of a manufacturing company was only slightly overweight and borderline diabetic when he collapsed after drinking a little too much at a party; cholesterol plaque formation had blocked one of his major arteries. Also common among youngsters is a combination of obesity, hypertension and diabetes, called metabolic syndrome, which predisposes them to various cardiovascular problems.

WHO DOES IT AFFECT?

Those in the finance sector, especially investment bankers and stockbrokers, and young managers handling large teams, are prone. SR Handa, consultant cardiologist at Mumbai's Jaslok Hospital, says tight deadlines and stretched targets cause high stress, which executives try to alleviate by taking refuge in various kinds of addiction like smoking, drugs or junk food. Cardiologist Rakesh Rajani adds heart diseases are less common among CXOs today because, despite their greater responsibilities, they know how to channel their stress better.

TIPS TO COMBAT THIS

AVOID ADDICTIONS like smoking or excessive alcoholism.

FIND WAYS to de-stress through music, meditation, yoga or a hobby. And make time during the week to indulge in it.

DO SOME form of physical activity or exercise.

Obesity

WHAT IS IT?

This accumulation of excessive body fat is best measured in terms of the body-mass index (BMI) – a correlation between the weight and height of a person. In India, a BMI of 22-25 is overweight; above 27 is obese.

TIPS TO COMBAT THIS

EAT SMALL meals at regular intervals instead of fewer, bigger meals. Resist the urge to snack on junk food, or eating continuously as you sit and work at your computer. And exercise.

WHO DOES IT AFFECT?

Most commonly, entry-level and first-time workers. "Many companies offer free or subsidised food and snacks," says endocrinologist Manoj Chadha. "Young people joining the corporate world have a tendency to binge on these." Anyone with odd hours of work and high-stress jobs is prone: Stock market analysts, commodity traders, or HR people constantly on the move between centres. Food and beverage quality control experts are prone because of the nature of their work. Dr Sathesh V of Corporate Health India reports a new condition among corporates, called 'diabesity', a combination of diabetes and obesity.

THE PRESIDENT of a shipping company found he was pre-diabetic and rapidly gaining weight. But instead of medication, he asked his doctor to suggest changes in his lifestyle. He put a treadmill in office, and remains unavailable from 6-6.30 pm; he has switched to boiled, oil-free food; and since he travels a lot, he now walks around airport lounges while waiting. In just three months, he's fitter and healthier.



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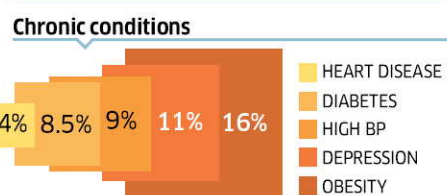
Unhealthy & Unwise

In 2009, ASSOCHAM conducted a survey among 200 member companies to gauge the health and awareness of their employees. It found a corporate class that was extremely unhealthy – and in a state of denial about it

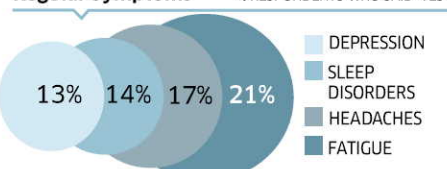
How do you think your health is?



Do you suffer from...



Regular symptoms



How much do you exercise?



SOURCE: Preventive Healthcare Impact on Corporate Sector, 2009, ASSOCHAM

Insomnia

WHAT IS IT?

A sleep disorder where a person is either unable to fall asleep or stay asleep as long as desired. Not once in the past six years has Pune-based IT professional Subhankar Ghosh (name changed) slept before 4 am. The 37-year-old heads a 10-member team, scattered from the US to Singapore. He's often taking calls through the night and trouble-shooting in different time zones. He sleeps most of the day, and get-togethers, outings and even vacations pass in a blur.

WHO DOES IT AFFECT?

Staffers in BPOs, the hospitality industry and emergency services who work nights or in shifts. Sales and marketing people with travel commitments (especially those traveling through changing time zones), those managing teams in different parts of the world and entrepreneurs. "Sleep disorders are more in the middle management," says Dr N Ramakrishnan of Chennai's Nithra Institute of Sleep Sciences. "They are not quite senior leaders with benefits, yet they have more responsibilities than low-end employees."

TIPS TO COMBAT THIS

DO A SELF-evaluation to assess how your sleep patterns are disrupted and create a 'sleep adaptation plan' – compensate for your lack of sleep on the job by either sleeping early or catching a nap when you have time.

MANAGE WORK around your sleep time. Share the workload or swap duties with colleagues so you can get a few days of continuous rest. Some companies have 'rest time' structured into shift timetables. Stick to it.

DO BREATHING exercises, yoga or meditation. If not possible to work out regularly, do a few quick exercises to increase your flexibility, like stretching.

Diabetes

WHAT IS IT?

A metabolic disease that leads to high blood sugar, particularly when the pancreas is unable to produce enough insulin. Can lead to central obesity – that is, an apple-shaped body, with a potbelly, high blood pressure and high lipid count

WHO DOES IT AFFECT?

This 'lifestyle-induced' disease is affecting younger professionals, says physician Hemant Thacker. "Sedentary lives, inadequate exercise and poor eating habits add to this," he says. "Young managers are sitting at their desks and constantly munching on snacks. Or they are burning the candle at both ends, and after working long hours, go out drinking or go home to a sleepless night. This, in turn, increases the stress." On weekends or holidays, they are exhausted and turn into couch potatoes, sitting in front of the TV and snacking on fried food.

TIPS TO COMBAT THIS

MAKE EXERCISE a part of your daily routine. If you can't go to the gym, take the stairs at work or walk to places.

IF YOU have a sweet tooth, make sure you consume things made of easily-assimilable sugars.

GET A medical check-up regularly.

Hypertension

WHAT IS IT?

This does not mean high tension, but refers to high blood pressure. Normally, blood circulating in the body exerts pressure on the walls of the blood vessels to allow the forward flow of blood. When this pressure goes above normal, it becomes a situation of hypertension. This can lead to heart attacks, strokes and renal failure, among other things.

WHO DOES IT AFFECT?

On-the-go executives, or those with pressing deadline and targets. Sales, finance and stock-market employees, as well as factory-floor workers involved in hard manual labour. "This is common in middle- and upper-management given their increased responsibilities," says physician Hemant Thacker. "This is especially true of people who are over-achievers. Every job comes with a reasonable amount of pressure. But if you don't recalibrate your workload, you will be heading for hypertension."

TIPS TO COMBAT THIS

SLOW DOWN and downsize your targets according to your possible physical and mental output.

TAKE BREAKS between periods of high pressure.

GET YOURSELF checked frequently. You might find you need medication to keep your BP under control.

Depression

WHAT IS IT?

Depression has become the most common disorder among people today, with women being more prone than men. Caused by chronic stress, it manifests itself in physiological ways (high blood pressure and pulse rate, with impaired brain function) and non-physiological ways (rage, irritability, forgetfulness, anxiety, restlessness, agitation, sleeplessness and lack of focus). Some unexplained physical symptoms like headaches, body ache and stomach pain, or a pain that continues for at least three months and does not respond to medication, could be stress-induced. "Depression is not a disease, but the body's way of telling you to slow down and manage the stress you are likely to experience," says psychiatrist Vihang Vahia.

WHO DOES IT AFFECT?

Anyone with a high-stress job. "Depression affects middle managers more than CXOs, even though the latter have more pressures," says Dr Vahia. "They also have people who can 'manage' their stress and share their workload." Stress arising from job insecurity, performance anxiety and peer comparison affects young executives; older managers may suffer success depression – struggling to reach a point in the corporate hierarchy, and then feeling a void once they have got there.

TIPS TO COMBAT THIS

ACCEPT STRESS – professional, personal or financial – as a part of your life. A 43-year-old CEO of an ITeS company was in a perpetual state of anger, and depressed, till he decided to spend less time quarrelling with people and more time being productive. This has calmed him down and put his life back on track.

DON'T BOTTLE up emotions. Talk to colleagues or your boss if something is bothering you at work.

RECALIBRATE YOUR goals and work output to your ability. Try not to overreach.