

# The Role of Our Environment on Obesity

## How much do our environments shape our ability to live healthier lives?

Many factors contribute to obesity - including our genes, lifestyles, and environment. Obesogenic environments interact with our biology to shape eating behaviours, stress, sleep, and physical activity - all of which can contribute to obesity, often without us realising it. Creating healthier environments benefits everyone – especially those who are more susceptible to developing obesity.



## What forms an obesogenic environment?

Obesogenic environments are shaped by many factors.

### Food accessibility & marketing

High energy-dense foods, fast foods, and sugary drinks are widely available and aggressively marketed.



### Design of urban and rural areas

Limited or unsafe spaces for physical activities discourage movement and exercise like walking or cycling.



### Socioeconomic barriers

Structural inequities limit access to nutritious foods, safe spaces, healthcare, and obesity treatment - contributing to unequal obesity rates and health outcomes.



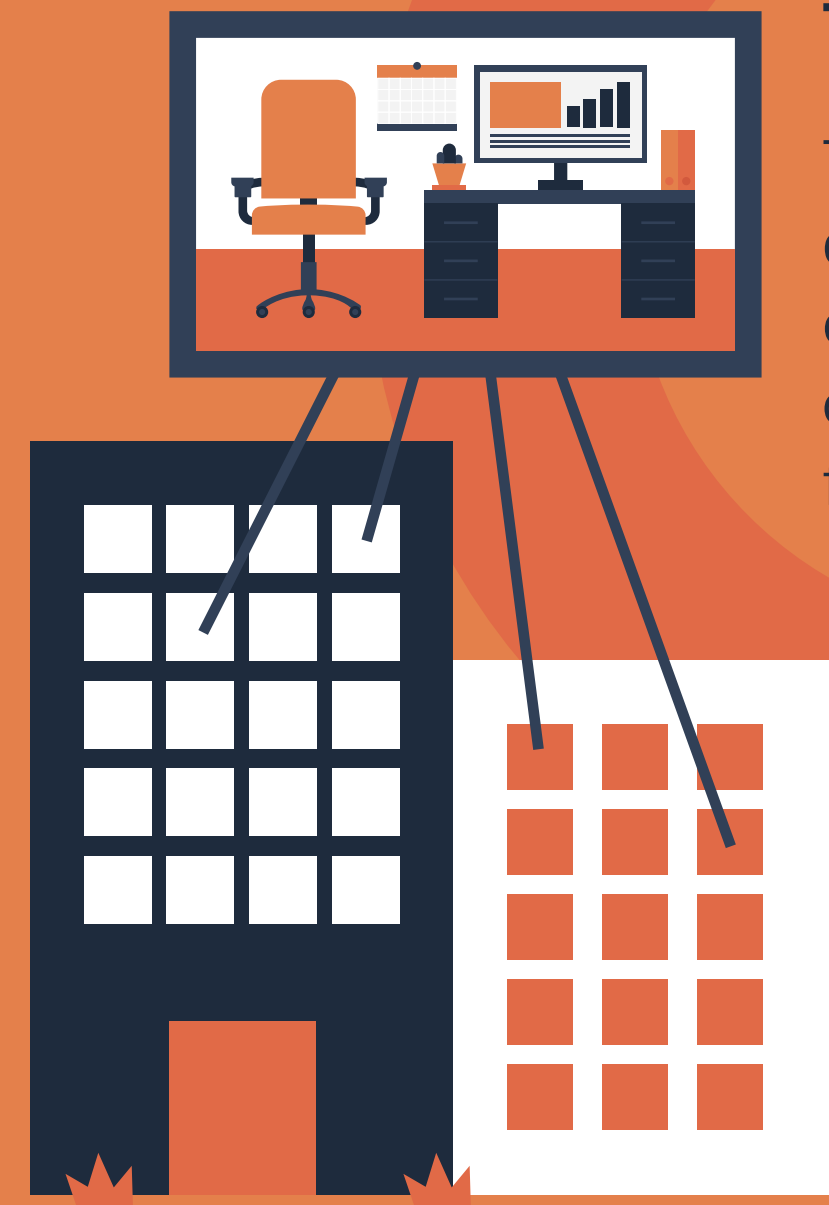
### Environmental pollution

Poor air quality, light, noise and other factors can disrupt sleep, elevate stress levels, and affect hormone and metabolic function.



### Technology

The rise of sedentary jobs, digital devices, and tech-driven environments has reduced opportunities and the requirement for daily physical activity.



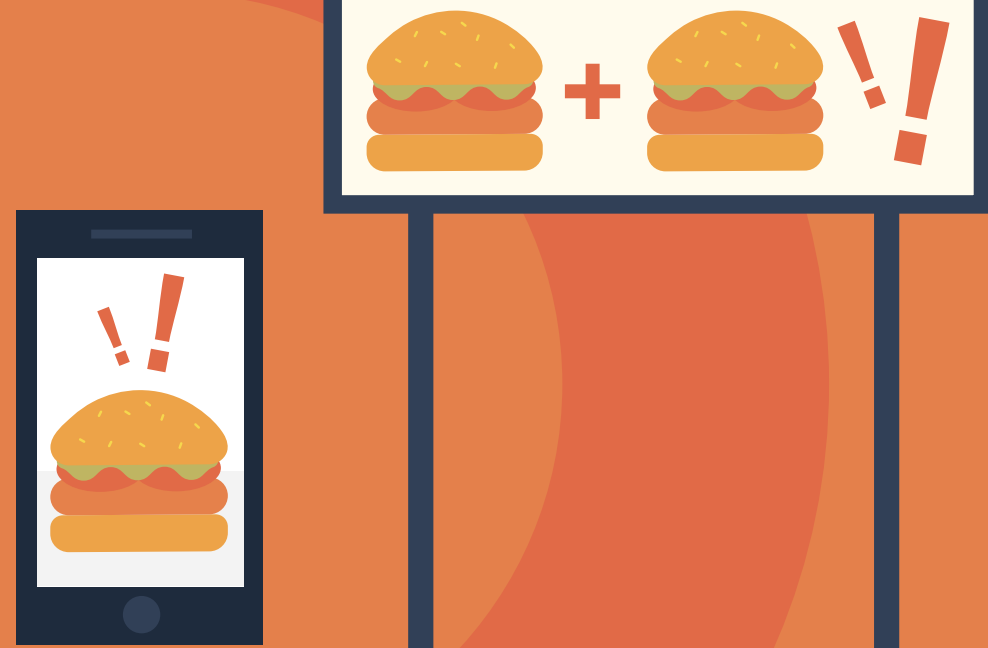
### Global trade

Energy-dense foods, such as sugary beverages and ultra-processed snacks, are spreading globally, increasingly replacing traditional diets that are often nutrient-dense and have fewer calories.



### Media and entertainment

Online trends, peer pressure and excessive screen time can promote unhealthy eating choices and inactive lifestyles.



## How does obesity affect our health and society?

Obesity impacts personal lives and our society as a whole.

### Rising obesity rates

Since 1990, adult obesity has doubled and adolescent obesity has quadrupled globally. In 2022, it was estimated that nearly 1 billion people worldwide were living with obesity. (WHO, 2024)



### Chronic diseases

Obesity increases the risk of other noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) like cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, digestive disorders, chronic respiratory diseases, and certain cancers. (WHO, 2024)



### Mental health effects

People living with obesity may face stigma and discrimination, which can lead to depression, anxiety, and social isolation - making it harder to engage in health-promoting behaviours. (Leutner et al., 2023)



### Economic impact

People living with obesity face 30% higher health treatment costs than those without, in addition to indirect costs such as those associated with premature death or obesity-related disability. In the EU, 8% of health costs were attributed to obesity. (WHO, 2022)

## How can society shape healthier environments?

Solutions need to support healthier lifestyle choices and access to care for everyone.

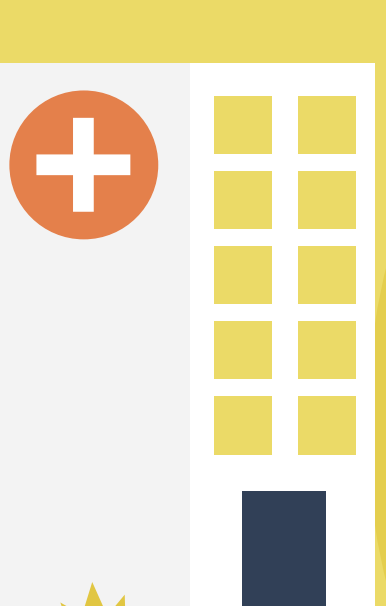
### Community programmes

Creating accessible, inclusive programmes that support physical health, mental wellbeing, social connection, and equitable access to care for all.



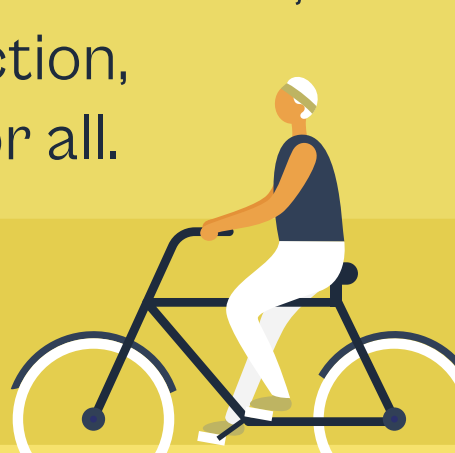
### Accessible healthcare

Comprehensive care for obesity includes prevention, support, and access to medical treatment, tailored to the individual's needs.



### Purposeful environmental planning

Having parks, safe walking and cycling paths, and other recreational areas that encourage movement and outdoor activities.



### Policy interventions

Improving investments in safe infrastructure, access to obesity care and treatment, or regulations on marketing of energy-dense food products, especially targeted at children.

### Making nutritious food choices easier

Encouraging a variety of nourishing foods in communities and schools. Supporting marketing and availability of affordable, accessible options that people enjoy and can include as part of balanced diets.



## In summary:

- ❗ Obesity is a complex disease involving genetic, physiological, environmental, and social factors.
- ❗ Individual biological factors, including genes, interact with external influences to contribute to obesity.
- ❗ Obesogenic environments are key drivers of rising obesity rates.
- ❗ Addressing obesity requires a combination of systemic changes and personal interventions.

## BETTER4U:

- ✓ Supports our understanding of obesity's root causes and how they interact.
- ✓ Empowers individuals with personalised information.
- ✓ Moves beyond the current "one-size-fits-all" approach to obesity.
- ✓ Helps adopt personalised lifestyle changes tailored to individual needs.