

# As physically active jobs decrease, obesity rates increase.

How sedentary jobs are fueling the U.S. obesity epidemic



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## Journal

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## Overview

The Journal: Obesity asked three different groups of nationally-acclaimed researchers to provide perspectives on possible contributors to rising levels of people struggling with obesity in the United States. Is it the quantity and quality of the food people eat, a lack of physical activity, or other behavior/ environmental factors—such as sleep habits and anxiety?

Findings show that the lack of physical activity associated with modern Americans occupations is a major contributing factor to weight gain.

## Description of study

The number of people in the U.S. living with obesity has risen to a whopping 42.4 percent. To research causation, The Journal: Obesity selected three groups of medical research leaders to provide their perspective on the causes of the obesity epidemic. One research team focused on food environment (such as the quality and quantity of healthy food); one research team examined environmental factors (like sleep, anxiety, and stress); and the third research team, Dr. Church and Dr. Martin, investigated the impact of reductions in physical activity on weight gain.

## Key Learnings

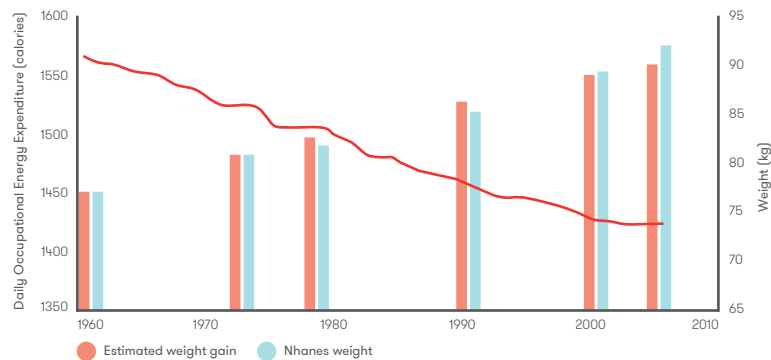
- **Of the three phases of the weight-loss continuum—initial weight gain, weight loss and weight-loss maintenance—the weight gain phase is the least understood.**
  - Studies don't support a strong connection between our food supply—the increase in variety, availability, and caloric density—and weight gain within the U.S. population.
  - Exercise accounts for a relatively small part of our total daily physical activity—evident by how Americans haven't changed how much we're working out but have gained weight over the last few decades.
- **Physically active occupations have decreased significantly over the last few decades.**
  - According to records collected by the federal government and classified by OSHA, in the 1960s, 50 percent of individuals had a job that required a level of physical activity that would meet the current daily physical activity goals. By 2006, less than 20 percent of Americans had jobs requiring the current recommended level of physical activity (see Figure 1).
  - The loss of occupational exercise has led people to burn between 100-150 less calories each day, which aligns closely with average amount of weight gained as people miss opportunities to be active while on the job.



**The loss of occupational exercise = weight gain as people miss opportunities to be active while on the job**

## Conclusion

The article shows formal exercise has not increased in the past 50 years, but occupation-related physical activity has decreased significantly during that same period of time. In fact, the expected weight gain for individuals based on the reduced amount of physical activity is nearly identical to the actual weight gain observed in the population.



**FIGURE 1:** The red line represents the decrease in daily occupational energy expenditure from 1960 to 2010 for men. The orange bars represent the expected mean body weights of men in the United States based on decreases in energy expended via occupations. The blue bars represent the mean body weights for men from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES).



## Why it matters

As technology increases, so does the prevalence of sedentary occupations and the associated weight gain—which exercise alone can't offset. If employers want to adapt, they'll **need to offer benefit solutions that are proven to provide weight-loss and management for their population.**

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