

Tackling obesity in seafarers

The Crew Health team recently analysed data from 900+ crew medical examinations where multiple illnesses were highlighted. Over 200 crewmembers failed their pre-sea medical examination due to a combination of serious illnesses in addition to obesity.

It could be argued that obesity alone is a pre-cursor to other more serious conditions if nothing is done to reduce BMI and improve lifestyle.

A BMI of 25 or above can signify a serious weight problem. Poor eating habits and an increasingly sedentary lifestyle can also contribute to the development of many lifestyle diseases.

An accurate clinical assessment is always required for crew members with raised BMI. If being overweight interferes with the person's role onboard or they are unable to perform part of their job (including safety responsibilities) they may be found temporarily unfit, which means they are unable to go to sea. At the time of a temporary unfit decision based on BMI or obesity, the medical examiner will usually provide advice on weight reduction and weight loss targets can be set to encourage improvement and reduction of BMI.

Carrying excess weight not only causes a strain on the system but can also lead to other serious illness, e.g. hypertension, type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease and even some



GETTING THE BALANCE RIGHT

This chart shows how much of each food group you should be eating



musculoskeletal conditions. It is within these illness groups that the UK P&I Club has seen the largest growth in crew medical failures.

Shipowners, and employers themselves, can also assist the crew to prevent obesity onboard by ensuring seafarers are provided with a healthy diet such as that recommended by The World Health organisation.

Fruit – A recommended 5-10 portions of fruit and vegetables per day.

Fat – A reduction in fat intake is encouraged. This can be achieved by changing cooking methods, i.e. swap frying for baking or steaming.

Salt – A lowering of salt levels can be achieved by not adding salt during food preparation, limiting the amount of salty, savoury snacks and not putting salt on the table at mealtimes.

Sugar – Sugar intake can be reduced by 10% by avoiding sugar sweetened drinks, snacks and sweets. Swap processed sugar for natural fruit sugars by eating fruit and raw vegetables.

Exercise plays an important part in achieving and maintaining fitness. Even a small amount of physical activity such as 30 minutes per day on an exercise bike can have positive results.

Crew members, given time, free space, and encouragement to exercise, will see the benefit of weight loss, but also a reduction in stress levels, improved sleep and a boost to their self-esteem.

Small steps, such as the above, help crew members to achieve and preserve good health, and employers to maintain a fit, healthy and happy crew. This helps to reduce the likelihood of poor health, leading to a shortened seagoing career or medical emergency at sea.

CREW HEALTH PROGRAMME

The Club was the first to launch a crew health scheme in 1996 due to increasing crew illness claims and a lack of accountability of clinics. Since 1996, the Crew Health programme has become one of the Club's leading loss prevention initiatives. The aim of the programme is to reduce the volume and value of crew illness claims which are caused by a pre-existing illnesses or disease. These underlying conditions often impact on the crew member's fitness for service and can endanger not only the health of the seafarer but also the onboard safety of other crew.

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Sophia joined Thomas Miller in 1992 and from 1994 worked as a claims handler dealing mainly with French and Spanish Members. In 2004, Sophia became the Crew Health Programme Director. Sophia has undertaken a large number of clinic audits, implemented the standard medical form and clinic guidelines. She has also lead the scheme through the largest period of growth and development with a doubling of approved clinic facilities and a four fold member increase. Sophia is a Director of Thomas Miller & Co. Ltd.

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Saidul Alom joined Crew Health from the European Region Service Team in 2004. Saidul provides administrative support to the Crew Health programme and is responsible for liaison with the approved clinics on financial billing matters and ensuring prompt payment of all clinic fees

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Stuart joined Thomas Miller in 1998 as a claims trainee for UK P&I Club's Greek Members. In April 2005 Stuart joined Crew Health as the Team Administrator. Stuart is responsible for co-ordination of Member entries and administration for the clinic approval process.