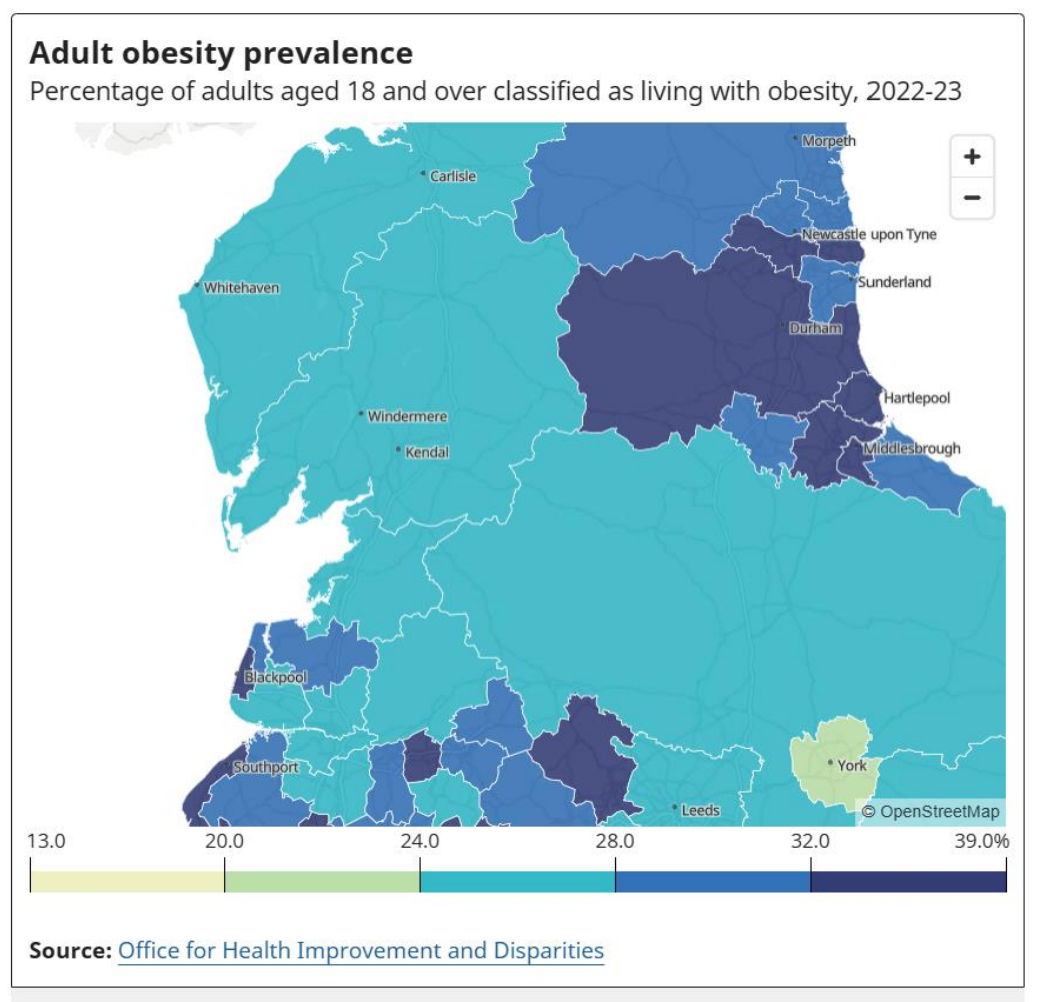
University of Sunderland

Weight-Friendly Workplaces In Sunderland: “Healthy Food Environments”

Presented by: Professor Yitka Graham

Authors: Ellen-Alyssa Gambles, Robyn Jones & Yitka Graham

Background



The prevalence of those living overweight, including with obesity, in Sunderland is higher than the average percentage of England (64.0%) at 65.1%.

Given that adults can spend as much as two-thirds of their waking hours at work, workplaces could significantly impact eating habits.

Research conducted on eating habits within workplaces has identified a number of perceived barriers to healthy eating, as well as several strategies which have been used to improve healthy eating within the workplace.

Aims and Objectives

Aims:

- To explore perceptions and provision of healthy food in workplaces across Sunderland
- To align this project to the Sunderland Food Partnership
- To develop an impactful, pragmatic policy/charter to facilitate healthy food environments in the workplace across Sunderland

Objectives:

- To understand the current provisions including similarities and differences of healthy eating across a variety of workplaces in Sunderland
- To examine the perceptions of employer representatives and employees on healthy eating in workplaces in Sunderland
- To identify the barriers that prevent employees from eating healthy in the workplace
- To ascertain employer representative and employee recommendations for overcoming barriers to healthy eating in the workplace

Methods

- 8 interviews (45 mins)
- Analysed using Thematic Analysis.
- Findings used to inform the online questionnaire

Employer representative interviews

Employee online questionnaire

- 78 employee online questionnaire responses.
- Descriptive statistics of quantitative data.
- Thematic Analysis of open text box qualitative data.

- 2 interviews based upon questionnaire (45 mins)
- Analysed using Thematic Analysis.
- Findings used to provide further insight.

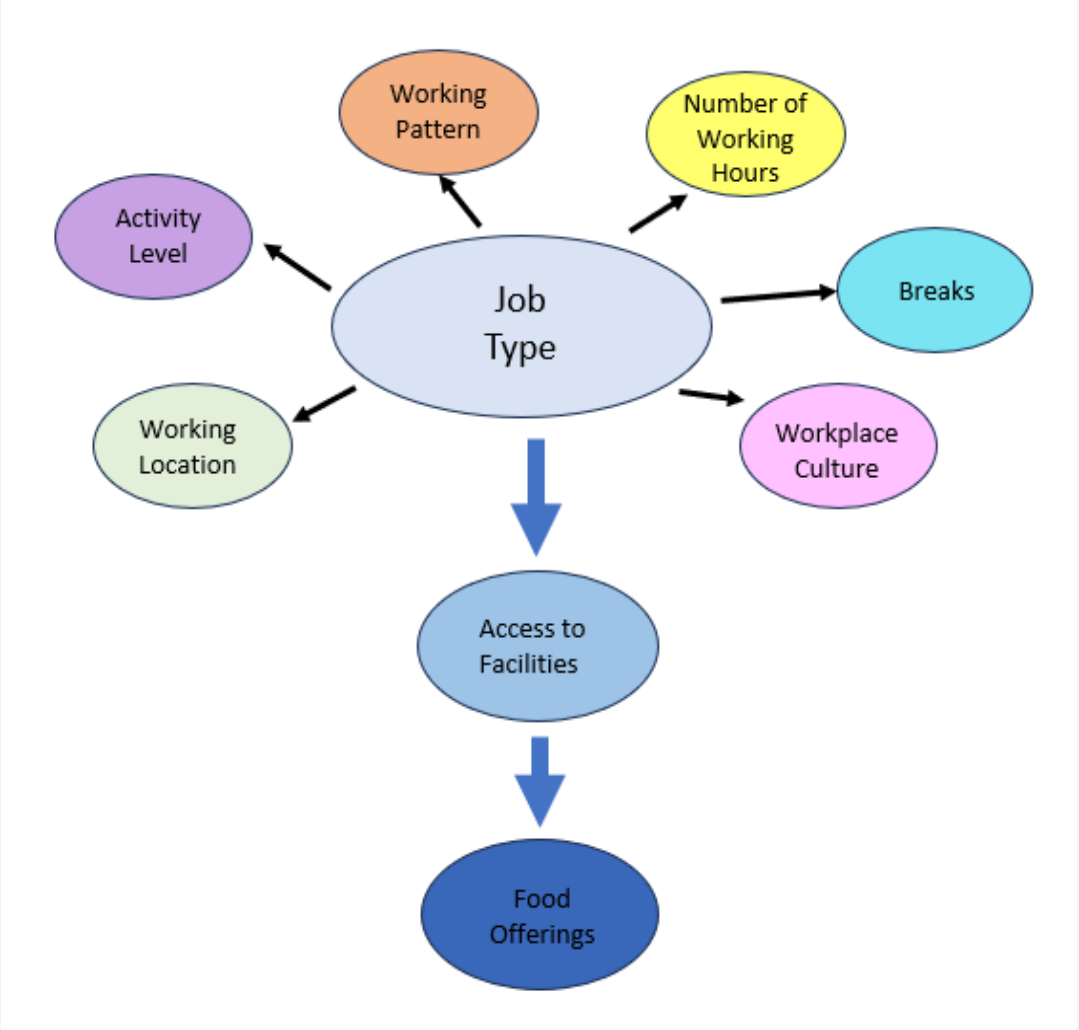
Employee follow-up interviews

Results

The major themes of Barriers and Enablers developed from both employers' representatives and employees were identified to act on a **personal level**, or to have been influenced by **workplace determinants.**

Results: Barriers

Job type: was linked to access to healthy food offerings– Working location, activity levels, working pattern, number of working hours, workplace culture, breaks determined employee access to facilities and food offerings.

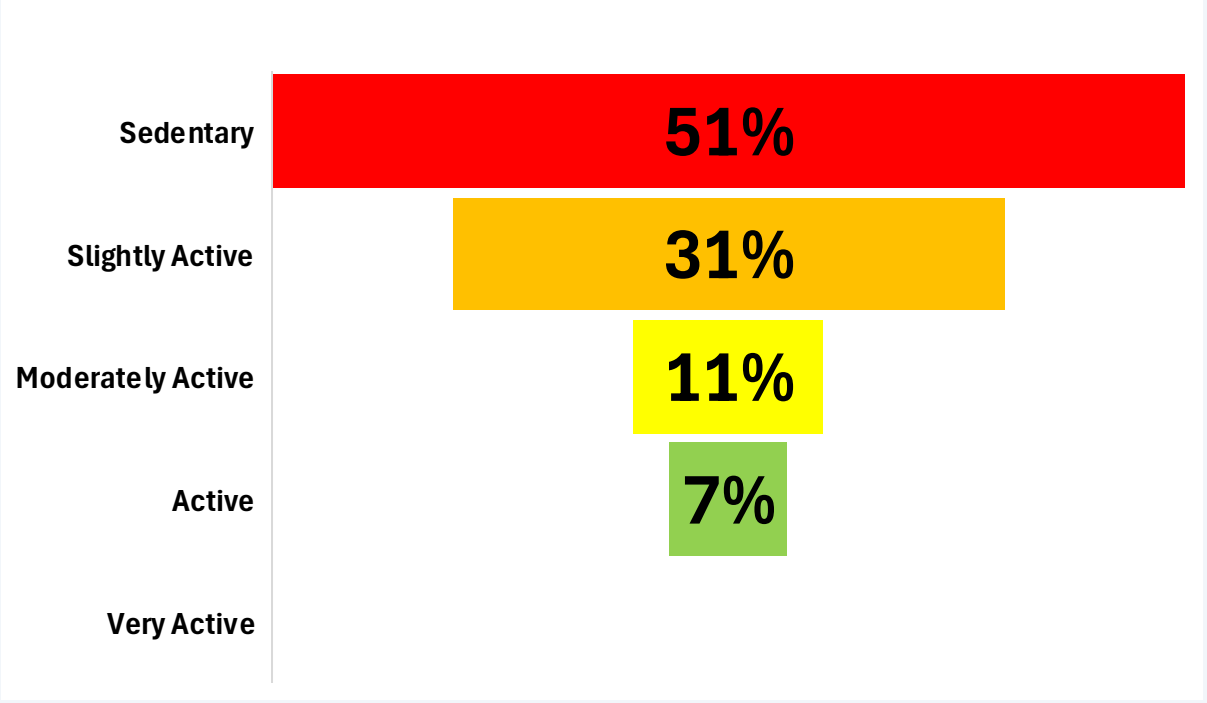


Results: Barriers

Representativeness: Participating workplaces offered job roles of different types, but the majority of respondents had more sedentary roles which were typically desk-based

Knowledge: Dependent on the workplace, subgroups of employees (e.g. age groups, job roles etc.) had less nutritional knowledge.

Shift Working: Shift workers were perceived to have poorer dietary habits, consuming higher calorie, fried and sugary foods.

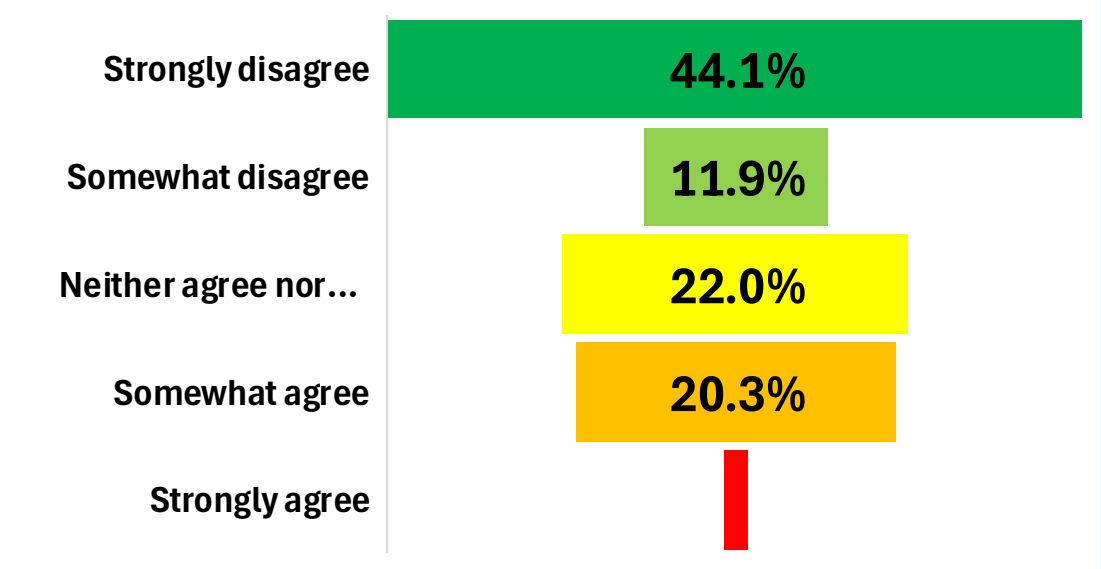


Participants' reported levels of physical activity within their job role.

Results: Barriers

Time (Breaks): For some respondents, the length of break times were an issue – as they needed to travel to get food on/offsite or due to meetings/workload pressures - increasing the likelihood of making poorer food choices

Time (to Prepare): Participants felt that purchasing ingredients and preparing healthy meals at home to bring in to work was overly time-consuming for them.



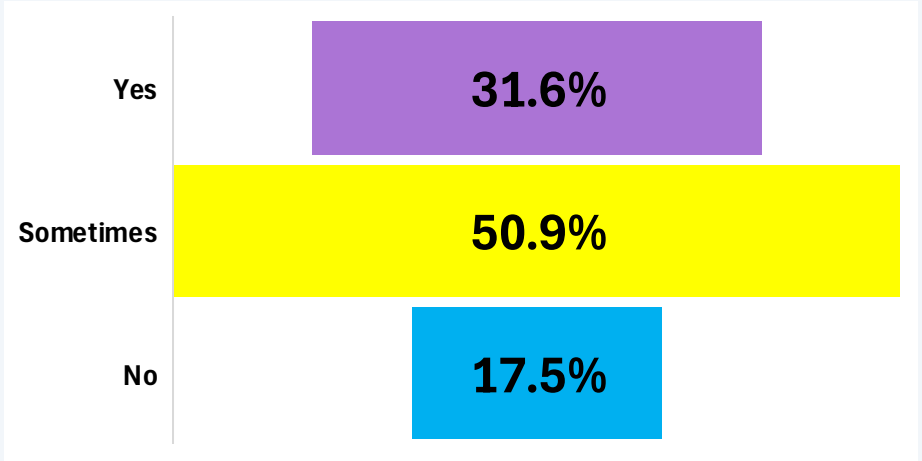
Responses to: The time I get as a break to eat is a barrier to healthy eating.

Results: Barriers

Financial: Eating food from home was cheaper than that bought onsite. Healthier foods were perceived to be more expensive whether brought in from home or purchased onsite.

Emotional Eating: Evidenced by snacking/treats due to boredom, stress, or as a reward

Health Promotion: Promotion of healthy eating appears to be limited, consisting mainly of online portals and free fruit on certain days of the week.



Responses to: Do you treat yourself/snack during your working day?

Results: Enablers

Facilities & Offerings: To encourage and support healthy eating in the workplace, employers should provide a range of facilities, take a consistent approach to create a high-quality food environment that includes all sources of food, and offer subsidised healthy food options.

Health Promotion:

- Employee education on nutrition, menus, recipes and cookery skills may help overcome the barriers around food preparation.
- Targeted education for workers in sedentary roles on physical activity, dietary habits and nutrition to maintain a healthy weight and reduce their risk of chronic health conditions.
- Targeted training for employee subgroups and consideration of digital literacy, working patterns and workplace access to avoid exclusion in the delivery of interventions.
- To mitigate mental health issues and emotional eating in employee, collaborate with employers to tackle workplace stressors and provide education on mental health issues including healthier ways to reduce stress.

Recommendations

- Enhance inclusion of employees from different types of work in research studies by taking into consideration potential barriers to access/engagement.
- Continue to work closely with workplaces to develop tailored interventions which meet the needs of their specific workforce and the resources available to them.
- Increase education and health promotion to ensure employees can make informed decisions surrounding their eating habits.

Acknowledgements

Our sincere thanks to Sunderland City Council and the Workplace Health Alliance for their assistance, with a special thank you to Gerry Taylor and Joan Dolan for their support.

We are also deeply grateful to all the participants from the various workplaces who took part.

Thank you for listening

Any questions?

For more information, please contact
ellen.gambles@sunderland.ac.uk

Better Health at Work Award

University of Sunderland

Sunderland City Council

Sunderland Workplace Health Alliance
IMPROVING HEALTH & WELLBEING IN THE WORKPLACE