

# Perception: Skinny people aren't lazy but overweight people are

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Research at the University of Alberta shows that when a thin person is seen laying down watching television, people assume they're resting. But when people see an overweight person relaxing, it's automatically assumed they're lazy and unmotivated.

Tanya Berry, from the U of A's Faculty of [Physical Education](#) and Recreation, says these stereotypes about overweight people need to be addressed. Berry says just because a person is overweight, it doesn't mean they don't [exercise](#), and just because a person is thin, it doesn't mean they are fit and healthy.

Berry had a group of study participants look at a number of pictures that would flash on a computer screen. After each photo a sedentary word such as "lazy" would appear. After the participants looked at each picture they were asked to say the colour of each word. Berry says when a picture of a thin "couch potato" came up, the participants were quick to say the colour of the word that appeared. But when a photo of an [overweight person](#) lying down appeared, the study participants paused. Berry concluded that the slow reaction resulted as the stereotyped thoughts automatically set in, with the participant thinking about the person being lazy rather than thinking about the colour of the word.

Berry says the research is important because stereotypes can influence the way people behave. She believes that more awareness of stereotypes can help people counter the effects. For example, if you're aware that you hold a [stereotype](#) about a couch potato you're less likely to be

negatively influenced by those stereotypes.

Provided by University of Alberta

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