

# Kids feel they can have their cake - and eat it!

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Children use the same psychological ploys as adults to justify eating junk food, according to new research.

University of Derby doctorate student Atiya Kamal says primary school children use Compensatory Health Beliefs (CHBs) in the same way as adults. And she says this could be contributing to increasing obesity levels in the population.

Adults who hold CHBs justify doing something unhealthy because they plan to do something healthy later on, to make up for it.

Atiya, 28, said: "Have you ever thought: 'I can eat that chocolate cake because I am going to the gym later?'" That is an example of a

Compensatory Health Belief. These types of beliefs can damage efforts to maintain or lose weight if individuals then don't actually get to the gym.

"It is widely accepted that many adults hold these types of beliefs, and I wanted to find out if children also have them, and if they might contribute to [childhood obesity](#) levels. My research suggests this is indeed the case, and work must be done to address the issue and combat these beliefs among children."

Atiya argues that levels of obesity in the UK are on the rise despite initiatives such as eating five portions of fruit and vegetables a day, and children's TV programmes which promote exercise. It may be that it is the influence of CHB's that are impacting on the effectiveness of such interventions.

For her doctorate study, Atiya, supervised by University of Derby psychology lecturer Dr. Vicki [Staples](#), interviewed around 100 boys and girls in primary school education, aged from five to ten, about their diet and activities, and how this links to CHBs.

Findings of her study, entitled: 'Do children hold Compensatory Health [Beliefs](#): an exploratory study' suggest children do hold CHBs in areas including physical activity, media related activities, a high fat and high sugar diet, oral health and sleep.

Talking about exercise, one six-year-old girl who took part in the study explained why it is acceptable to watch TV for a long time: "I go out, run around, go back in and watch TV again." An older boy, aged nine, explained his reasoning further: "because you're cancelling out the bad."

Using these findings, Atiya has developed a child compensatory health belief scale which will measure CHBs across a variety of health areas, to

support future work in this area and contribute to reducing the rising rates of obesity.

Provided by University of Derby

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