

Children living close to fast food outlets more likely to be overweight

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Children living in areas surrounded by fast food outlets are more likely to be overweight or obese according to new research from the University of East Anglia (UEA) and the Centre for Diet and Activity Research (CEDAR).

New research published today looked at weight data from more than a million [children](#) and compared it with the availability of [unhealthy food](#) from outlets including fish and chip shops, burger bars, pizza places, and sweet shops.

They found that older children in particular are more likely to be overweight when living in close proximity to a high density of unhealthy eating outlets.

It is hoped that the findings will help shape planning policy to help tackle [childhood obesity](#).

Prof Andy Jones, from UEA's Norwich Medical School, led the research. He said: "We found that the more unhealthy food outlets there are in a neighbourhood, the greater the number of overweight and [obese children](#). The results were more pronounced in secondary school children who have more spending power to choose their own food.

"But the association was reversed in areas with more healthy food options available.

"This is important because there is an epidemic of obesity among children in the UK and other industrialised countries. It can lead to childhood diabetes, low self-esteem, and orthopaedic and cardiovascular problems. It is also a big problem because around 70 per cent of obese children and teenagers also go on to have weight problems in later life."

Study co-author Andreea Cetateanu, from UEA's school of Environmental Sciences, said: "We know that fast food is more common in deprived areas of the UK and that over-weight children are more likely to come from socio-economically deprived populations. But associations between children's weight and the availability of junk food have not been shown before at a national scale."

"If we can use these findings to influence planning decisions and help create a more healthy food environment, we may be able to help reverse this trend for future generations."

"Public health policies to reduce obesity in children should incorporate strategies to prevent high concentrations of [fast food](#) and other unhealthy [food outlets](#). But there is no quick fix – and any interventions for tackling childhood obesity and creating environments that are more supportive for both physical activity and better dietary choices must be part of the bigger picture looking at the whole obesity system."

The research team used data from the National Child Measurement Programme which records the height and weight of one million children at the majority of state schools in England annually.

They took into account factors such as people living in rural locations having to travel further to buy [food](#), and other variables such as the proportion of children living in low income households and measurements of green space which have both been associated with exercise in children.

More information: 'Understanding the relationship between food environments, deprivation and childhood overweight and obesity: evidence from a cross sectional England-wide study' is published in the journal *Health and Place* on February 14, 2014.

Provided by University of East Anglia

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