

New research shows how to tackle obesity

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One size does not fit all when it comes to tackling obesity, according to a new study by the University of Sheffield.

Researchers looking at how to tackle the country's [obesity](#) issue - which costs the NHS £6billion pounds every year - found that currently individuals are often treated the same regardless of how healthy they are, where they live or their behavioural characteristics.

The research found those who have a BMI of 30 or over actually fit into one of six groups and strategies to successfully tackle weight loss should be tailored according to which group they fall into.

The study, led by Dr Mark Green from the University's School of Health and Related Research (ScHARR), identified the six groups as: young males who were heavy drinkers, middle aged individuals who were unhappy and anxious, older people who despite living with physical health conditions were happy, younger healthy females, older affluent healthy adults and individuals with very poor health.

Researchers highlighted the importance for [health policy makers](#) to recognise differences in individuals with obesity and to target or tailor interventions accordingly. The approach may not just be more effective in helping individuals to achieve a healthier lifestyle, but a targeted healthcare approach could also be a more efficient use of NHS services.

Dr Green, said: "Policies designed to tackle obesity and encourage healthier lifestyles often target individuals just because they are obese.

But a focus on just the group as a whole is not very efficient. We are all different and different health promotion approaches work for different people.

"Our research showed that those in the groups that we identified are likely to need very different services, and will respond very differently to different health promotion policies.

""In the future, we hope that GPs will keep in mind these six groups when offering advice to their patients."

Researchers suggested messages about alcohol reduction could help tackle obesity in young adults while for middle aged individuals who are unhappy and anxious an intervention involving increasing exercise mixed with psycho-social counselling could be beneficial. Young healthy females may not need any intervention, researchers said.

For those in the poorest health group the study showed advice surrounding exercise may not be reasonable and much more modest goals may be needed and for the affluent healthy elderly weight loss could be a priority.

Researchers used data from the Yorkshire Health Study which included 4,144 obese individuals. They hope the findings, which are published in the *Journal of Public Health*, will provide advice for policymakers and drive future studies into tackling obesity.

Provided by University of Sheffield

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