

# Gene variation identified for teen binge eating

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A variation of a gene that can lead teenagers to binge eat has been identified by researchers. The work, carried out by academics at UCL and the universities of Bristol and Queensland, hope the finding will allow a better understanding of why binge eating develops, and inform the development of future preventative strategies for teens at risk before they become overweight or obese.

Around ten per cent of adults and teenagers binge eat (excessively overeat with a feeling of losing control over what they are consuming) and binge eating is most common in individuals who are overweight or obese. While it has been established that a combination of genetic and environmental factors lead to [eating disorders](#), until now there has been limited research into how specific genes increase the likelihood of binge eating behaviours in adolescence that can lead to obesity.

A team, led by Dr Nadia Micali at the UCL Institute of Child Health and Professor David Evans, who carried out some of the work while at Bristol before moving to Queensland's Diamantina Institute and MRC Integrative Epidemiology Unit, analysed data from 6,000 participants in the Children of the 90s (ALSPAC) study, also based at Bristol, when they were aged 14 and 16.

Genetic variations associated with higher BMI (Body Mass Index) and [obesity risk](#) were investigated to see if they also predicted binge eating.

The researchers found that if a young person had a particular variation in the FTO gene locus (rs1558902), they were over 20 per cent more likely to binge eat. The pattern was particularly evident in girls, who were 30 per cent more likely to binge eat if they had the variation.

Lead author Dr Nadia Micali, Senior Lecturer and Honorary Consultant Psychiatrist at the UCL Institute for Child Health and Associate Professor of Psychiatry at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, said: "This research offers an important first step towards understanding the genetic risk for binge eating and will help inform how we develop strategies to counter the obesity crisis.

"We now know variations in the FTO gene can predict binge eating in teenagers, and binge eating in turn can predict obesity. Eventually this finding could allow us to develop more targeted treatment for [binge](#)

[eating](#), and enable much earlier intervention so young people don't develop obesity."

**More information:** "Are obesity risk genes associated with binge eating in adolescence?" *Obesity*, 23: 1729–1736.  
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Provided by University of Bristol

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