

# Comfort food leads to 'Kummerspeck'

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People who overeat when they are depressed should be treated differently than those who lose their appetite. And eating while happy does not lead to weight gain.

People who suffer from the more typical, classic [depression](#) do not have much of an [appetite](#) while depressed. Sometimes, however, depression is accompanied by an increase in appetite and ultimately in body weight as well. These people tend to suffer from atypical depression and feel especially down in the winter. In a long-term study among 298 fathers and 294 mothers, eating behaviour researcher Tatjana van Strien found after five years that the [weight gain](#) in mothers was a result of their [emotional eating](#). Emotional eaters [eat](#) when they are sad, frustrated, down, or even out of boredom.

## Different types of depression

Dividing depression into subcategories is still a fairly recent phenomenon, says Professor Van Strien, but looking at emotion-based eating behaviour is an effective tool to do just that. Atypical depression (where people do not lose their appetite) calls for different treatment methods than classic depression (where people do lose their appetite). Van Strien recommends tackling the emotional element of eating when treating people who eat when depressed. 'Emotion regulation therapy' is very suitable for this and, when successful, reduces depression as well.

## Comfort food

Another study by Van Strien, which was published online last week, shows that a more accurate formulation is needed for the notion that emotional eating is linked to the risk of developing obesity. In three different studies, she found – along with colleagues from VU University and Radboud University – that eating while experiencing [positive emotions](#) does not appear to result in weight gain. "Eating when feeling positive emotions generally involves externally-induced appetite: you feel hungry because there is food on the table, or because something smells good. So we need to be more specific: eating while experiencing negative emotions is what makes you gain weight. The Germans hit the nail right on the head when they coined their unique word Kummerspeck, which basically means 'worry fat'."

**More information:** Tatjana van Strien et al. Emotional eating as a mediator between depression and weight gain, *Appetite* (2016). [DOI: 10.1016/j.appet.2016.02.034](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2016.02.034)

Tatjana van Strien et al. Is desire to eat in response to positive emotions an 'obese' eating style: Is Kummerspeck for some people a misnomer?,

*Appetite* (2016). [DOI: 10.1016/j.appet.2016.02.035](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2016.02.035)

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