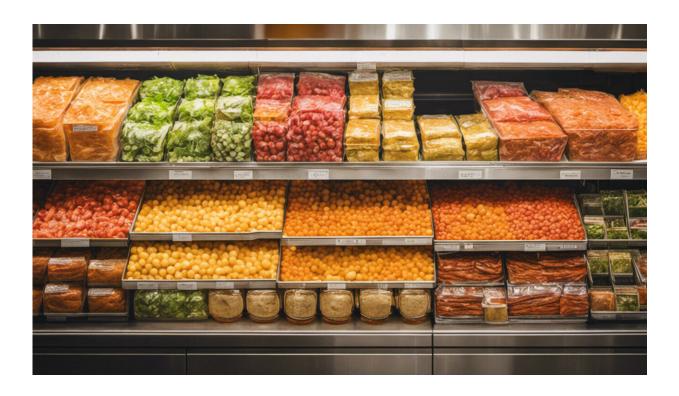# Tackling obesity with soups, smartphones and supermarket shopping

September 23 2016

Credit: AI-generated image (disclaimer)

Being overweight or obese increases your risk of developing long-term and life-limiting health problems, like type 2 diabetes, heart disease and certain cancers.

In Oxfordshire, according to Public Health England, between 2012 and

2014 almost 61 per cent of adults were either overweight or obese.

"Most people who are overweight tell us they would welcome support to lose weight, but to help people make healthier food choices and control their weight we need to find out which methods are truly effective," says Professor Susan Jebb, Professor of Diet and Population Health at Oxford University's Nuffield department of Primary Care Health Sciences, who leads the CLAHRC's new Behaviour change: Diet and Obesity research theme. She continued: 'these new studies are exciting because they create interesting new partnerships between the academic, health and commercial sectors to find new ways to improve health."

Three projects carried out in Oxford University's Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences aim to do just that.

The first project, led by Research Fellow Dr Nerys Astbury, will examine the effectiveness of meal replacements, such as low-calorie soups, shakes and portion-controlled foods, to help people lose weight. They will identify the factors associated with success and use this information to develop a programme that GPs or nurses could recommend for people to follow at home.

The second project, led by GP and Professor of Behavioural Medicine Dr Paul Aveyard, will examine the thoughts and feelings that help or hinder weight loss in people who weigh themselves regularly. Dr Aveyard's team will then develop and trial a smartphone app which coaches people through the steps to successful weight loss through self-weighing at home.

The final study, led by Research Fellow Dr Carmen Piernas, will work with a local supermarket to give people monthly feedback on the nutritional content of their food shopping, based on information collected on their reward card. This will focus initially on saturated fat, a

risk factor for heart disease. The reward card data will be used to suggest healthier alternatives to foods high in saturated fat, such as butter and red meat, to help people with high cholesterol to reduce their risk of heart disease.

The work has been awarded funding from the NIHR CLAHRC Oxford, which is an initiative led by the National Institute for Health Research – the research arm of the NHS – and is hosted by Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust. The CLAHRC funds and supports collaborative research projects into developing creative new ways of providing and targeting health services across Oxfordshire and the Thames Valley region by bringing together universities, charities, local authorities and industry.

In addition to funding projects themed around behaviour change in diet and obesity, the CLAHRC is also launching a further nine projects to target health and social care issues ranging from preventing falls in the elderly to identifying and treating cancer patients who have depression.

"Tackling local problems in health and social care is a key goal of the NIHR CLAHRC Oxford," said Professor Richard Hobbs, Director of the CLAHRC. "By working with universities, charities, industry and local health services we believe these projects could make a real difference to the health and well-being of people in Oxfordshire, the Thames Valley and the wider country."

Provided by University of Oxford