

# Treating obesity and depression concurrently

May 24 2017, by Taryn Lores

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Treating depression and obesity together is at the heart of a new health program with global ramifications.

The South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI) in Adelaide will trial a world-first group intervention that draws upon several established approaches to boost patient [health](#) and wellbeing in the coming months.

The program, developed in the past six months, is being trialled in South Australia and will be rolled out internationally if successful.

The link between depression and obesity has been established for some time but treating them together has not been attempted before.

According to the *Journal of Health Psychology* and the European Association for the Study of Obesity, people who are overweight are two to four times more likely to develop depression and people who were depressed were twice as likely to become overweight or obese compared to their healthy counterparts.

The World Health Organisation estimates 300 million people of all ages suffer from depression worldwide and obesity has more than doubled since 1980.

Taryn Lores, a health psychologist within the Mind and Brain theme at SAHMRI, said there were many mechanisms that needed to be addressed if people were expected to recover from depression and be at

ease with their bodies in the long term.

"Depression and being overweight or being above the healthy weight level, are things that are most commonly experienced together," she said.

"People who are depressed are prone to things like over eating, bad eating habits and less frequent physical activity. Likewise, you have people who are mentally healthy but if overweight are prone to developing [mental health issues](#) linked to depression.

"This program is meant to help people set realistic goals and set changes that will become habitual and lifelong and we see this program, this dual focus, being more effective because treating them separately could be getting in the way of actually treating them at all in the long run."

SAHMRI's treatment program involves a two-hour group session each week for 10 weeks. Topics covered will include various Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) techniques and mindfulness strategies.

Patients will also be required to attend additional appointments at SAHMRI for further assessments and follow-ups after the 10-week period.

Researchers are targeting a trial group of about 15 volunteers to take part in the project.

SAHMRI Mind and Brain theme Leader and Professor of Psychiatry at Flinders University Julio Licinio said that with major depression, people might also experience either a loss of or a large increase in appetite.

"Weight gain can bring about a sense of worthlessness and loss of control, leading to a cycle of dieting and a sense of failure," Professor Licinio said.

"We have created a program of psychological interventions that tackle both the feelings that surround food and weight loss, whilst exploring the impact of [depression](#) in this process.

"The program includes a series of educative strategies that respond to this complex combination of issues, with the intention of increasing the success and understanding of sustained weight loss over time."

Provided by The Lead

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