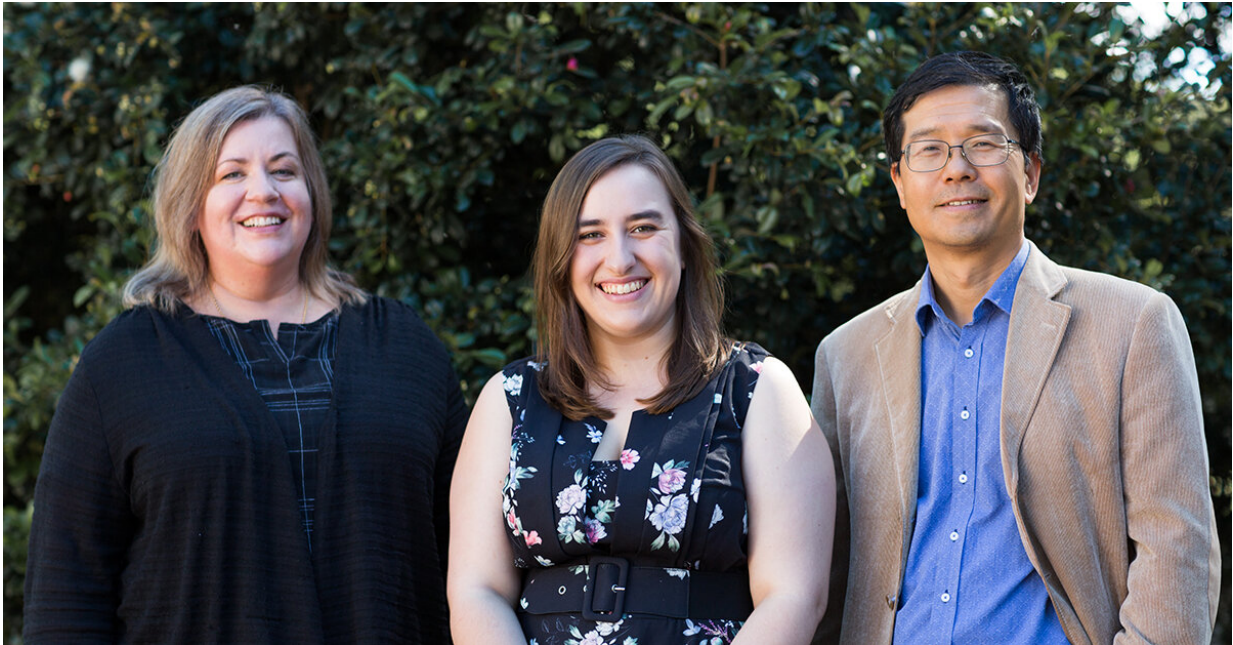


Do you comfort eat when you are blue?

April 5 2019, by Louise Negline



Dr Susan Thomas, Jessica Mills and Professor Chao Deng. Photo by Trudy Simpkin. Credit: University of Wollongong

A team of researchers at the University of Wollongong (UOW) School of Medicine and the Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute (IHMRI) has found that people who are depressed are at higher risk of weight gain.

Gaining weight puts them at risk of other health problems later in life including heart

disease and [metabolic syndrome](#).

Comfort eating is often believed to be the cause of expanding waist lines in people with depression, but how or why food is used to help cope with stress or sadness is unclear.

"Our study investigated several pathways that might be related to comfort eating in depression. We measured weight, body mass index (BMI), depression symptoms and eating behaviours as well as hormones," said Ph.D. candidate Jessica Mills.

The team of researchers also includes, Dr. Theresa Larkin, Professor Chao Deng and Dr. Susan Thomas.

The team measured [appetite hormones](#) including grehlin, which should stimulate appetite and leptin, which should reduce feelings of hunger.

For people suffering depression the research suggests they may experience hormonal dysregulation.

Early findings suggest [excessive eating](#) may be linked to an insensitivity to hormonal signals, by which the usual signals of being hungry or full are not being received properly.

"The results showed comfort eating was more common in people with depression than those without, and was more common in females than males," Jessica Mills said.

"This indicates that excessive eating in [depression](#) may be more closely related to hormones than previously realised, rather than just being related to psychological issues."

A new, larger study is soon to get underway in the Illawarra which will

follow participants over a period of 12 months. It is hoped this trial will help determine which comes first – do hormones caused the comfort eating or does comfort eating affect the hormones?

More information: Jessica G. Mills et al. Weight gain in Major Depressive Disorder: Linking appetite and disordered eating to leptin and ghrelin., *Psychiatry Research* (2019). [DOI: 10.1016/j.psychres.2019.03.017](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2019.03.017)

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Provided by Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute

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