

Psychology can help patients beat obesity problem, says expert

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Psychologists have expertise to understand the causes of obesity and should be central to help the prevention and treatment of the condition, according to a leading Health Psychologist from the University of

Bedfordshire.

A [new report](#) from the British Psychological Society calls for changes in how obesity is regarded, with less reference to "[obese people](#)" and more discussion of "people living with obesity" in an attempt to reduce stigma and both conscious and unconscious bias and discrimination.

The report calls for government to ensure every initiative aimed at promoting a healthy weight is informed by psychological evidence. It says weight management services are best delivered by multidisciplinary teams that include psychologists and calls for those working in the area to be suitably trained.

Dr. Angel Chater, reader in [health psychology](#) and behavior change at the University of Bedfordshire and one of the authors of the report, said: "Despite the increasing media and political attention to the issue related to obesity, and the tremendous amount of work being accomplished by psychologists and [medical professionals](#) working within the field, it is clear that the percentage of individuals living with obesity is only increasing.

"This cannot be explained by a sudden loss of motivation across the four nations of the UK.

"The increase in obesity can in part be attributed to changes in the food supply and physical activity environment."

Building on Public Health England's "Improving people's health" strategy, for which Dr. Chater was also an author, the report highlights the need to adopt a psychological framework that takes into consideration behavioral and social sciences.

Dr. Chater said: "To address obesity, we need an understanding of all its

causes; biological, psychological and social, and use behavior change approaches for prevention and weight management that are informed by psychology and can be replicated and rolled out nationally.

"We have the [scientific evidence](#), theoretical frameworks and [clinical experience](#) as psychologists to support [policy makers](#), campaigns and [health professionals](#) to make a positive impact on obesity levels in the UK and there are lots of examples of good practice in our report."

The BPS report touches on "emotional eating" and says that those who diet frequently may be more inclined to overeat when they are feeling particularly vulnerable. It also argues that people become overweight or obese as a result of a complex combination of factors, including genetics, responses to stress from childhood and how we deal with emotion, and our social and physical environment such as only poor food choices being on offer.

Provided by University of Bedfordshire

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