

Scientists launch trial to test whether brain training could help people lose weight

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Virtual supermarket



You will visit 2 shops.

From one shop you will select foods that you would like to eat **less of**.

From the other, foods that you would like to eat **more of**.

These foods will be used in your training so that the app is personalised to you!

[Continue to the supermarket](#)

Credit: Cardiff University

Researchers at Cardiff University have launched a new app called "Restrain" to test whether it is possible to lose weight through a type of brain training involving simple games.

The team from the University's Brain Research Imaging Center (CUBRIC) are calling for volunteers to take part in the trial, which will be the largest study of its kind.

They hope to recruit thousands of volunteers who are overweight or living with obesity to use the app, which works by asking users to complete short and simple tasks on a daily basis.

Project lead Professor Chris Chambers said: "Previous research has suggested that brain training could be a successful method of weight loss—however, most of this research has involved small groups of healthy weight people.

"Now, we want to find out if it can work in the real world and help those who are overweight or living with obesity. This is especially important now as so many people have struggled to maintain a healthy weight during the pandemic.

"To see if cognitive training really can change people's attitudes to food and encourage [weight](#) loss, we plan to recruit thousands of participants worldwide to use a specially designed app. It will be the largest study of its kind."

The new app, for smartphone and tablet devices, is designed to let users participate for small periods of time, whenever is convenient for them. Users will be asked to complete different short tasks each day, over a period of three months. Each daily session will take 10-15 minutes.

Researcher Mark Randle said: "The app tasks are designed to bias the user's thoughts and behaviors towards healthy foods and away from [unhealthy foods](#)."

"If they work at promoting healthy eating habits, then this training could become a useful tool for [weight loss](#), especially for people who struggle with exercise or dieting."

Researcher Ines Duarte added: "One of the possible advantages of such training is that it doesn't require much time or effort—it attempts to reprogramme a person's relationship with [food](#), rather than relying on willpower or requiring them to make dramatic changes to their lifestyle."

Participants can personalize their experience by selecting foods they want to eat more of and less of to include in their training.

Users will also be asked to weigh themselves once a week and to report which foods they have consumed. The research team will also measure attitudes towards foods, craving and exercise to see how these change with [training](#).

To take part in the trial people must be over 18 years of age, have a body mass index of 25 or over, have no past or current eating disorder, not be pregnant and not follow a restrictive diet, for example fruitarian or raw vegan. The Restrain app can be [downloaded from the Google Play store](#). The app is currently available for Android users only.

Provided by Cardiff University

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