

Generalized diet recommendations are doing little to change the obesity problem, says researcher

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Brendan Fraser's portrayal of an obese man in "The Whale" sparked an online debate about whether the film is "fatphobic" or an important

narrative that addresses the issue of eating disorders. Regardless of whether the film tackles the topic of obesity in the right way, it has shone a spotlight on it. Eating disorders effect [1.25 million people in the U.K.](#), and following Eating Disorders Awareness Week earlier this month, Dr. Adelina Gschwandtner, Senior Lecturer in Economics at Kent, explains why we need a new approach to addressing our obesity problem.

She says, "Obesity with its attendant impact on [health](#), has become a central problem in many Western economies. Obesity levels in the U.K. have more than tripled in the last 30 years, and the U.K. has reached the highest level of obesity in Western Europe, ahead of countries such as Ireland, Spain, Portugal, and Germany, being labeled '[The fat man of Europe](#).' This is not only a matter of life and death but also a problem that has a huge economic impact, as the cost of diet-related ill health for the health care system in the U.K. has been estimated to be £5.8 billion, whilst it is also estimated that if the population met national nutritional guidelines, the [health benefits](#) that would accrue would equal to a value of [£19.9 billion](#) per year in quality adjusted life years.

"Aside from the economic and physical-health problems associated with obesity, many fail to realize that obesity and poor lifestyles can be both a result of, and produce, poor mental health—resulting in individuals living not only a [less healthy but also a less happy life](#).

"Public health campaigns and healthy eating advice are aimed at tackling these problems, but, with increasing obesity levels risings, they're proving ineffective.

"In the U.K. everyone is encouraged to eat their '5 a day' and do at least 150 minutes exercise per week no matter of their gender, income, or other characteristics such body weight—and unsurprisingly, these recommendations have had only a [small impact](#).

"In fact, results from [a recent study](#) I have conducted, with colleagues from the University of Kent and Reading, which examines the link between [personality traits](#) and exercise, show that blanket recommendations to do more exercise may once again bring little results. From analyzing the impact of the personality trait of neuroticism on sports activity, the recommendation to more exercise might be especially hard to for neurotic people to adhere to. The results of the study suggest that neuroticism leads individuals to perform less [sports activities](#) despite exercise being one of the main ways to improve it.

"With results like this considered, removing the blanket 'more exercise, better diet' approach to tackling obesity, and replacing it with tailored lifestyle adjustments, informed by the personal characteristics of individuals such as gender, personality type and [body weight](#) could significantly improve results and potentially reduce the surging [obesity](#) levels in the U.K. and worldwide. With levels continuing to rise, it is clear that generalized diet recommendations are doing little to change our [obesity problem](#)."

Provided by University of Kent

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