

# Eating in the absence of hunger is a recipe for expanding waistline

25 June 2015, by Amanda Weaver



QUT Researcher Dr Stephanie Fay

A QUT researcher has had an article on how compulsive snacking is a major cause of weight gain published in the international journal *Eating Behaviors*.

Dr Stephanie Fay wrote the article entitled "Psychological predictors of opportunistic snacking in the absence of hunger" as part of her PhD undertaken at QUT's Institute of Health and Biomedical Innovation and it has also been included in the Elsevier Research Selection e-newsletter for distribution to science media worldwide.

"Eating too frequently, especially when we're not hungry, is a major potential cause of [weight gain](#)," said Dr Fay.

"Excessive portion size and energy-dense foods are often blamed for weight gain but the frequency of eating is a significant contributor too. Some people are more inclined to be susceptible to reward gained from foods.

"This study conducted by QUT investigated what

would happen when we offered volunteers a chocolate snack right after they'd had as much as they wanted of a similar snack food.

"We also explored what might differentiate people who accepted the additional snack, despite not being hungry, from those who said they'd had enough.

"Three-quarters of the people involved, who were unexpectedly offered a second chocolate snack immediately after being given as much they wanted of another chocolate snack food, ate that one too.

"Contrary to expectations, those who took the snack were better at inhibitory control, indicating that they were making a conscious decision. However, those who ate the most of the extra snack were more impulsive, and more responsive to food reward.

They were also heavier (with a higher BMI), which suggests that repeated snacking in the absence of hunger is a risk factor for weight gain."

Dr Fay is now based in London with the World Cancer Research Fund, which produces and disseminates research findings on factors that prevent or cause cancer, including obesity which is a cause of 10 different cancers, but will return to Brisbane in July for her QUT graduation ceremony.

She has previously conducted studies into how personality plays a role in weight loss or gain.

**More information:** "Psychological predictors of opportunistic snacking in the absence of hunger," *Eating Behaviors*, Volume 18, August 2015, Pages 156-159, ISSN 1471-0153, [dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.eatbeh.2015.05.014](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.eatbeh.2015.05.014)

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