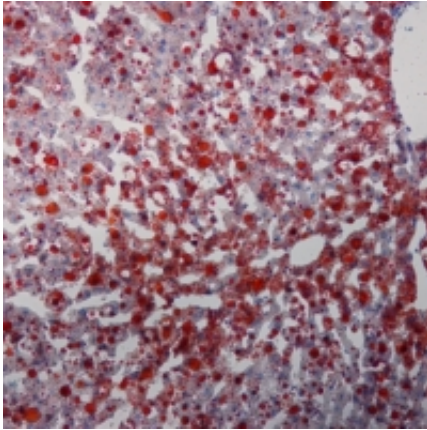


New research reveals obese individuals can't switch off from food

17 September 2015



Fat cells in a rat liver. Credit: Dr Peter Mark/UWA

A new study has revealed what many health care professionals have long suspected, that obese individuals have a specific difficulty in directing their own attention away from unhealthy foods, when compared to the rest of the population.

The research collaboration from The University of Western Australia and The Australian National University in Canberra comes as [obesity rates](#) in Australia continue to rise with far reaching health and economic implications.

Dr Jason Bell of UWA's School of Psychology said the research found the cognitive difficulty was specific for food, making the findings particularly interesting from a psychological perspective.

"We found that when the displayed images were not of food, such as chips or chocolate for example, but were instead of, say, kittens then [obese individuals](#) behave the same as normal-weight people and were able to look away," Dr Bell said.

"The research suggests that biases in basic cognitive processes are likely to be important

factors in the development and maintenance of obesity.

"The team is now planning to develop computerised training paradigms to reduce or eliminate these biases. Training like this could complement existing therapies and offer significant hope for improved outcomes in [obesity treatment](#)," he said.

Latest statistics from the Australian Bureau of Statistics reveal that more than 60 per cent of adult Australians and 25 per cent of children are overweight or obese.

"Obesity is linked to poorer health, reduced life expectancy, and an increase in the onset and severity of a range of major diseases," Dr Bell said. "Getting to the heart of what drives it and finding ways to mitigate it are incredibly important to us as a nation."

The study has just been published in the research journal *PLOS ONE*, an open access research journal that allows scientific articles to be freely accessed by all.

More information: "Reduced Inhibition of Return to Food Images in Obese Individuals." *PLoS ONE* 10(9): e0137821. [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0137821](#)

Provided by University of Western Australia

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