

Three months on the sofa? Binge eating, alcohol and lack of exercise hit England's mental health in lockdown

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Poor nutrition and less physical activity during lockdown, had a serious impact on mental health in England, according to preliminary findings today from an Oxford University study.

It has been widely suggested that mental health has been hit during the pandemic, but these worrying results suggest that the nation's behaviour during the lockdown may be a factor.

According to the survey from the Unit for Biocultural Variation and Obesity (UBVO), poor eating and reduced physical activity have been important factors in negative mental health during lockdown. The survey reveals:

- A stark rise in negative mental health since the start of lockdown measures—with younger adults disproportionately suffering
- Decreased physical activity—46% of participants are less active
- Increased binge eating and consumption of processed snacks and alcohol

Stanley Ulijaszek, Professor of Human Ecology and UBVO Director, says, 'COVID-19 lockdown

has resulted in increased [levels of anxiety](#), poor sleep, persistent sadness, binge eating, [suicidal thoughts](#), snacking, consumption of alcohol and reduced levels of physical activity.'

Professor Ulijaszek maintains, 'These changes have potential long-term consequences for [obesity rates](#) and chronic disease more broadly.'

You can take part in the survey until the end of this week, at www.oxfordobesity.org/COVID19. This work is funded by the Higher Education Innovation Fund and ESRC Impact Acceleration Account through the University of Oxford's COVID-19: Economic, Social, Cultural, & Environmental Impacts—Urgent Response Fund'.

It is feared that much of the work carried out on controlling the rates of increase in [childhood obesity](#) in England may be undone by COVID-19.

In light of the Government's concern about obesity in relation to COVID-19, UBVO has contributed an Evidence Brief to the DEFRA National Food Strategy independent review. The Brief calls for a multi-level approach, allows for acting on the relationships between food insecurity, inequality, deprivation, and childhood obesity.

Professor Ulijaszek and Michelle Pentecost (UBVO) are contributing authors to the Report of the WHO Ad Hoc Working Group on Science and Evidence for Ending Childhood Obesity, for the WHO Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity (2016), which underpins the WHO Report of the Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity (2016).

The UBVO is an interdisciplinary research unit based in Oxford's School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography. It is dedicated to understanding the complex and interwoven causes

of [obesity](#) in populations across the world.

More than 800 adults in England, aged between 18 and 81, took part in the electronic survey between 19 June and 6 July. They were questioned about [mental health](#), eating and [physical activity](#) before lockdown, during early lockdown and at the time of survey.

More information: Changes in mental health, eating and physical activity in England across Covid-19 pandemic lockdown.

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Provided by University of Oxford

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