

Obesity, eating behaviour and physical activity during COVID-19 lockdown: A study of UK adults.

COVID-19 and the measures taken to curb the pandemic were likely to have substantial impacts not only on the physical health of individuals but also on their emotional, mental, and social wellbeing. The pandemic has disrupted food supply chains, limited access to fresh foods, and increased the dependence on unhealthier food products with a long shelf life. Healthy behaviours, such as physical activity (PA), have declined. However, such lifestyle behaviours are more important than ever due to the increased risk of hospitalisation from COVID-19 for individuals with higher body mass index (BMI). This study examined the perceived barriers to weight management in the UK during the COVID-19 lockdown between April-May 2020.

Adults (N=2002) completed a survey with measures including PA, diet quality, dietary patterns, and mental/physical health. It was predicted that “higher BMI may be associated with negative changes in weight-related behaviours and experiencing more barriers to weight management.” Results from the study confirmed this trend: engagement in PA decreased during the lockdown, with 40% of participants reported exercising less frequently. Low-income, non-white, higher BMI, and people with poor mental health were most significantly affected. Limited access to healthy food, lack of motivation, and lack of social support were reported as barriers to weight management. 56% of participants, in turn, reported snacking more frequently.

The research confirms that “adults already of higher BMI may be most at risk of increased weight gain because of the COVID-19 crisis.” Weight gain prevention efforts should therefore remain a priority both during the management of the ongoing pandemic as well as in the recovery plans.

Robinson, E., Boyland, E., Chisholm, A., Harrold, J., Maloney, N., Marty, L., Mead, B., Noonan, R. and Hardman, C., 2021. Obesity, eating behavior and physical activity during COVID-19 lockdown: A study of UK adults. Appetite, 156, p.104853.