

# Why being fattist can make it harder for overweight people to shed the pounds - because they comfort eat

- Study finds obese people who faced discrimination were three times more likely to still be very overweight
- 'Fattism' drives those sensitive about their weight to comfort eat

By [Fiona Macrae](#)

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Poking fun at someone's weight might lead to them piling on the pounds.

A study found that people who are stigmatised for being fat are more likely to become obese.

Similarly, those who are already dangerously overweight are less likely to lose weight if they feel they are being treated differently because of their size.

It is thought 'fattism' drives those who are already sensitive about their weight to comfort eat. Fear of ridicule may also mean they avoid exercise.

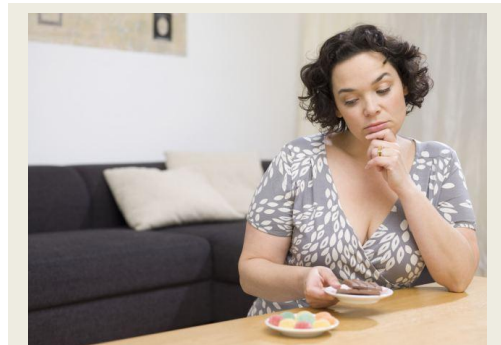
The researchers said that weight discrimination is often justified on the grounds it shocks people into action but it can have the opposite effect.

More than 6,000 men and women were weighed and measured. They were also whether they had faced 'everyday discrimination', such as being treated with less respect than others, and if, so what was behind this.

Reasons given for discrimination included weight, race and sex.

The volunteers were weighed and measured again four years later and the data analysed.

This revealed that there was no link between sexism or racism and weight gain.



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However, those who had suffered weight discrimination were two and a half times more likely to have become obese than those who had not been stigmatised because of their size.

And those who were already obese and were picked on because of it were three times as likely to still be very overweight.

The Florida State University researchers said that 'fattism' can take many forms, from hurtful comments to being overlooked for a job.

### **NO WILLPOWER? FIGHT FAT BY REMOVING TEMPTATION**

Research at Cambridge University shows that the best way to avoid temptation is not to face it in the first place.

In the case of dieters, this means not buying chocolate biscuits, rather than trying to resist raiding the biscuit tin.

Researcher Molly Crockett said that willpower is not the only form of self-control and anticipating problems also helps.

Dr. Crockett, who worked with German researchers on the project, said: 'Our study suggests that the most effective way to beat temptations is to avoid facing them in the first place.

'It confirms in the lab what we knew all along intuitively, which is that removing temptation from your choice base is a really effective way of reaching your long-term goals.'

The stress of being stigmatised can drive people to comfort eat, with calorie-laden fatty foods particularly desirable.

Researcher Angelina Sutin said the link could leave the overweight trapped in a vicious circle which makes weight loss even more difficult to achieve.

Writing in the journal PLoS ONE, she added that health campaigns must take care not to try shame people into slimming.

Dr. Sutin said: 'There is a difference between fighting obesity and discriminating against individuals who are obese.

'It is counterproductive if the campaign is aimed at shaming and blaming the individual.



The researchers said that health campaigns must take care not to try shame people into slimming.

'It is possible to promote a healthy lifestyle without being stigmatising.'

In Britain, fears of discrimination led to the word 'obese' being banned on official letters to parents of fat children.

The term was replaced by 'very overweight' on warning letters sent out as part of a national child measurement programme.

Sir Liam Donaldson, the then chief medical officer, said obesity had become a taboo word.

Tam Fry, of the National Obesity Forum, said that if people are told they are fat often enough, they begin to believe it.

However, there is a place for tough love.

He said: 'If your nearest and dearest tell you that you are fat in the right way, that could be a good thing. It is no good pussyfooting around it.'

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-2380688/Being-fattist-make-harder-overweight-people-shed-pounds--comfort-eat.html>