

# Tackling the Obesity Crisis

David Benton

# Tackling the Obesity Crisis

Beyond Failed Approaches  
to Lasting Solutions

 Springer

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## Preface: Tackling The Obesity Crisis

Having for over fifty years studied the relationship between the body's biology, diet, and behaviour, I became increasingly aware there was a major problem that I had ignored. Obesity.

It was apparent that the incidence of obesity had increased steadily for over fifty years, while a multitude of initiatives had aimed to deal with the problem. In fact, workers at Cambridge University counted 689 initiatives in the United Kingdom over the last thirty years. However, given the progressive increase in obesity, and the government projection that it is expected to increase even further, a safe conclusion is that these initiatives failed.

Given the enormous consequences of obesity, and the failure to deal with it, there were obvious questions. Why had attempts to reduce obesity failed? Is it possible to distinguish those approaches that do, or do not, have a chance of making a difference?

It became clear that it is a problem influenced by many aspects of biology, nutrition, and psychology that are affected by aspects of society. The number of calories consumed is so many more than is needed that it is inconceivable that most interventions could do more than scratch the surface. It was rapidly apparent that there are no easy answers, and it was inevitable that most of the approaches taken to date were bound to fail.

Given the thousands of people who have studied the topic over many decades, it would have been delusional and arrogant to suggest I had the answer. Rather the aim was to stimulate debate. Can a consensus be established that the approaches taken to date are not going to have the desired effect? Do we need a new approach?

It may be asked, why is this a book written for a general rather than an academic audience? It was apparent that there are two groups that, in the past, have been reluctant to act. The food industry has a vested interest in maintaining a very profitable business model. Politicians have looked for a quick fix, when major and complex long-term changes are required. The view taken was that both these groups were unlikely to change their behaviour unless it was in their interest.

Thus, the book is aimed at the public, with the hope that obesity becomes a hot topic with extensive media exposure, to the extent that it cannot be ignored. It is scandalous that so many are condemned to an early death, following decades of ill-health: obesity must be given a high priority.

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# Acknowledgement

Obesity is not the study of one scientific discipline but draws on a wide range of approaches that interact in complex and often unpredictable ways; so basic biology is modified by psychological, social, cultural, and economic factors. I am therefore indebted to the many colleagues, with whom I have worked over the decades, who have introduced me to yet another perspective on the topic. I must in addition offer an apology to friends and family, as the time taken when writing has inevitably resulted in them being neglected. Particular thanks are due to Tanja Weyandt, who as editor, continually offered encouragement and good advice, with the result that the book benefited greatly from her knowledge and experience.

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## About the Author



**David Benton** PhD, DSc, is Professor of Psychology at Swansea University, UK. His interest in the influence of diet on brain functioning and cognition has resulted in over 200 research articles and an H Index to 57 (Scopus).

The acceptance of over 200 invitations to speak on six continents, and the widespread interest from multi-national food and ingredient companies, illustrates his impact. His work is quoted by the governments in the USA and UK when making public health recommendations. Invitations have been accepted to give evidence to the House of Commons and House of Lords in the UK.

The theme of the proposed book is that obesity cannot be understood without the perspectives of nutrition, physiology, biochemistry, psychology as well as societal viewpoint. His research reflects this range and has included papers on portion size, genetics, food addiction, sugar addition and non-nutritive sweeteners. A paper on calorie intake and the control of weight has been downloaded 35,000 times.