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# Device to retrain youngsters' eating habits in obesity fight

## Consuming food more slowly is key to improving body mass index

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**OBESE youngsters are more likely to lose weight if they use a new device that tracks their eating, according to scientists in the city.**

A team at Bristol Children's Hospital and Bristol University compared portable computerised weighing scale, the Mandometer, to standard treatments.

The device helps retrain youngsters to eat less and more slowly by giving them feedback during meal times.

If food is leaving the plate too quickly, the computer tells children if they should slow down and it also has a graph so that they can see the speed and portion size they should be sticking to.

When people eat too quickly there is not enough time for hormones from the small intestine to send a message to the brain about being full-up, researchers say.

People often suffer weight problems if they eat too quickly because they eat more food before they realise they are full.

Professor Julian Hamilton-Shield, who runs clinics for youngsters who are overweight and obese at Bristol Children's Hospital, carried out research into using the device and now wants to see the Mandometer being used in health centres to help youngsters control their eating habits.

About 100 children in the area, aged nine to 17, were involved in the

research trial, which is published on *bmj.com*, the online journal of the British Medical Association, today. Some were given the Mandometer, while others were given more standard treatments, such as education and advice about eating.

Both groups were encouraged to increase their levels of physical activity to 60 minutes of exercise a day. Participants were assessed

after 12 months and followed up at 18 months. During the research period they were also regularly monitored and offered telephone support and encouragement.

After 12 months, the Mandometer group had a significantly lower average body mass index and body fat score than the standard care group. Their portion size was also smaller and their speed of eating was reduced by 11 per cent while the other group gained four per cent.

The improvement in body mass index was maintained six months after the end of treatment, suggesting that youngsters had made a long-term behavioural change as a result of using the Mandometer.

As reported in the *Evening Post* last month, a third of children in Bristol are overweight or obese when they leave primary school, according to the latest NHS figures.

Prof Hamilton-Shield's clinic was seeing about 250 youngsters a year in Bristol alone, but a lack of funds means that they can now only see the worst cases.

He said: "Learning about healthy

eating and exercise works well for younger children because often their parents still have an influence, but adolescents don't tend to listen to messages.

"The Mandometer gives them something to relate to."

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**Professor Julian Hamilton-Shield**

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**Healthy count:**  
Professor Julian Hamilton-Shield with Mandometer which is helping youngsters lose weight, Cecilia Bergh (founder of Mandometer), and Barbro Olofsson (case manager from Sweden)

**Photograph:**  
Jon Kent

