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## Food machine takes aim at child obesity

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Teenagers are famous for not wanting to do what people tell them, but evidently they are prepared to make an exception for a machine.

A computerised device that keeps track of how much, and how quickly, the user is eating can help obese adolescents lose weight by training them to make better mental connections between the size of their meal and how full they feel, British researchers have shown.

Called the Mandometer, the Swedish-developed device connects a scale that sits under a dinner plate – weighing the food remaining on the plate – to a graphic screen that represents the ideal speed of eating. Too great a departure from that line, either from eating too slowly or too quickly, prompts a voice instruction.

At regular intervals, the user has to rate their feeling of fullness, which then appears as a dot on the screen, forming a graph as the meal progresses. This is also compared to an ideal pattern for people of normal weight.

University of Bristol researchers trialled the Mandometer in 54 teenagers and compared their progress over a year with that of 52 similarly obese young people who received only usual dietary advice.

They found the Mandometer group reduced their preferred portion sizes over the period, and lost weight, maintaining the improvements over the next six months after they stopped using the machine.

The therapy, "seems to be a useful addition to the rather sparse options for treating adolescent obesity effectively without [drugs]," wrote study leader Anna Ford today in the medical journal *BMJ*.

*This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/wellbeing/food-machine-takes-aim-at-child-obesity-20100106-1t9a.html>*