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Introduction: The increasing prevalence of obesity, the limited effectiveness of traditional weight loss methods and the increased consumption of highly processed foods have led the scientific community to investigate eating behaviours with addictive properties. Furthermore, both addictive processes and depressive symptoms involve dopaminergic pathways, which may underlie the co-occurrence of food addiction (FA) and depression.

Objective: Three cross-sectional studies were conducted (during and after the COVID-19 pandemic and among adults with excess body weight who were trying to reduce it). The aim of the studies was to test the complex relationships between body weight and FA, self-reported depression and selected lifestyle factors, which were developed and described in a fourth paper - a review - in the context of depression.

Methods: A total of 1,066 participants, 750 and 204 adults respectively, took part in the study. Psychometric tools used in the analyses included the Yale Food Addiction Scale 2.0 (YFAS 2.0), the Zung Self-Rating Depression Scale (SDS) and the Three-Factor Eating Questionnaire-R18 (TFEQ-R18). In addition, the Food Frequency Questionnaire (FFQ-6) and the Global Physical Activity Questionnaire (GPAQ) were used. Anthropometric measurements as well as blood pressure, lipid profile and fasting blood glucose were taken at the centre organising the weight-loss holidays for adults.

Results: Lifestyle changes in adults during the COVID-19 pandemic regarding physical activity and work situation were shown to be associated with increased FA. In addition, there was a higher body mass index (BMI) and weight gain and the presence of depression among those showing FA symptoms during the pandemic. There was a higher prevalence of FA among middle-aged adults with higher BMI and body fat levels. FA among adults was closely associated with self-reported depression, both during and after the pandemic.

Conclusions: The findings highlight the need for targeted interventions and further research into both weight control and addictive eating behaviours.

Key words: eating behaviours, food addiction, mental health, obesity, physical activity