



Doctors turn on No 10 over failure to curb obesity surge

Major food and drinks firms fuel crisis with irresponsible marketing, claim doctors, who call for ban on fast-food sponsorship deals

Denis Campbell and Daniel Boffey
guardian.co.uk, Saturday 14 April 2012 16.49 EDT
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London Olympics staff deliver Coca-Cola branded drinks to the Aquatic Centre. Photograph: Graham Turner for the Guardian

The body that represents every doctor in the country has launched an unprecedented attack on the coalition government's failed strategy to tackle an **obesity** epidemic in the UK.

The Academy of Medical Royal Colleges demands "bold and tough" measures to put an end to the role of "irresponsible marketing" by major food and drinks firms in fuelling the crisis. It calls on the health secretary, **Andrew Lansley**, to ditch the government's "inherently flawed" approach, which trusts the industry to voluntarily cut calories, reduce portion sizes and advise the public on healthy eating.

Instead, the academy's vice-president, Professor Terence Stephenson, says the government must take on the major brands, some of which he likens to the tobacco giants of the last century that stalled radical measures designed to save lives in order to protect their profits.

According to the latest research, 48% of men and 43% of women in the UK will be obese by 2030, a trend that will significantly increase the

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prevalence of strokes, heart disease and cancer, and lead to higher costs for the NHS. The academy, an umbrella organisation for the medical royal colleges and their 200,000 members, demands:

- A ban on firms such as McDonald's and Coca-Cola from sponsoring major sports events such as the Olympics.
- A safe area around schools where fast-food outlets are not allowed.
- A prohibition on the use of celebrities or cartoon figures to sell unhealthy food and drink to children.
- A legal obligation on all food and drink manufacturers to publish on their products clear guidelines about the amount of calories, sugar, fat and salt.
- Consideration of "fat taxes" similar to those being implemented in Scandinavia, designed to penalise the buyers of food and drink high in salt, sugar and fat.

Stephenson said the academy was speaking out as it launched an investigation into what can be done to curb the rise in obesity. It will spend six months researching the causes and effects of obesity, and in the autumn will produce a report that will contain far-reaching recommendations for action.

Charlie Powell, campaigns director of the [Children's Food Campaign](#), applauded the academy's intervention. He said: "Andrew Lansley should act on this excellent set of robust recommendations, but his track record suggests that he will once again ignore the advice of our best medical experts."

Speaking to the *Observer*, Stephenson said urgent action, similar to that undertaken to reduce smoking over the past two decades, was necessary to deal with a society that he defined as "obeseogenic" – an environment that positively encourages the gaining of weight.

Stephenson, who is also president of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, which represents the UK's 11,000 children's [doctors](#), said: "What can you do about this obeseogenic environment we live in? The fact that Coca-Cola and McDonald's are two of the big corporate sponsors of the Olympic Games is most unhelpful. One of the biggest events we're ever going to see in the UK, all those people watching TV and going through the doors will be seeing this. People must be influenced by it, or why would Coca-Cola spend a lot of money to be at the Olympics?"

A major part of the government's strategy to deal with obesity and drink-related problems has until now been "responsibility deals" in which the major food and drink brands have been asked to voluntarily curb their excesses and use their influence to encourage healthier living.

The health secretary has been a strong supporter of the policy, but Stephenson said it was a mistake. "I think a lot of people would draw analogies with smoking, where the smoking industry for many years seemed to actually fight what was to doctors clearly a growing, important public health issue for individuals. And that's where their profits come from and they sometimes, by appearing to go along with these ideas, they actually stall or prevent more aggressive measures.

"Doctors think it's inherently unlikely that huge companies that make money from selling high-calorie foods and drinks, like McDonald's and Coca-Cola, are going to persuade their customers [to eat more healthily]. It's like asking the petrol companies to say to people, 'why not go on your bicycle?'. It just does not seem likely that's going to happen."

Stephenson also voiced concern that Carling, the beer company, is the title sponsor of the English Football League's Carling Cup. He said: "For

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adults, beer is a source of calories. I like going to a football match and drinking beer, but it's the high-profile sponsorship that means that every time we mention this trophy, we mention in the same words Carling Cup."

In criticism of other promotional tactics, Stephenson said he was "concerned" that characters from children's films are used to help sell fast food.

Barbara Gallani, director of food safety and science at the Food and Drink Federation, the body that represents the interests of the UK's food and non-alcoholic drinks manufacturers, said the academy was wrong to dismiss the benefits of partnerships between food and drink brands and sports events, although she agreed some action was needed.

She said: "Food manufacturers have a good track record of making positive contributions to improving public health through a wide range of actions, whether it's developing healthy choices, reformulating recipes of some of the nation's favourite foods, or working to improve the food literacy of consumers."

A spokesman for Coca-Cola said: "Without the support of sponsors such as Coca-Cola as many as 170 of the 200 national Olympic committees would be unable to send athletes to compete."

A Department of Health spokesman said the government was committed to identifying the best possible evidence of what works in tackling obesity.

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14 April 2012 9:21PM

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DanielFrisbee
14 April 2012 9:21PM

I'm sure the Tories will defend the freedom of the plebs to indulge in their addictions of choice so long as it turns a profit for shareholders.

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LittleNigel57
14 April 2012 9:22PM

Pasties?

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LSE2002
14 April 2012 9:23PM

If you resolve to give up smoking, drinking, fast food and loving, you don't actually live longer; it just seems longer,...

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Rubbernuke
14 April 2012 9:24PM

Does make me laugh...but then what do you expect from money obsessed governments and corporations? Respect and restraint or just a shameless pursuit of profit?

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mekonista
14 April 2012 9:24PM

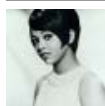
Fat chance.

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kjee
14 April 2012 9:26PM

A ban on firms such as McDonald's and Coca-Cola from sponsoring major sports events such as the Olympics.

Don't worry Ronald and you Coke chaps.. you'll soon own your own private hospitals anyway.

We'll all benefit when you are running the NHS... Think of all those catering contracts.

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YOCAMERON
14 April 2012 9:27PM

Doctors turn on PM over failure to curb obesity surge

Yes, David Cameron does appear to have put on a rather large amount of weight since becoming PM. It's no doubt due to all those lavish dinners for donors he has

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been attending. Also when you realise he appointed Pepsi Cola and McDonalds to be consultants on obesity then it's pretty obvious that the man is insane. From now on he shall be known as " Chubby Chops" Cameron.



[youarehavingalough](#)

14 April 2012 9:27PM

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[maggieTee](#)

14 April 2012 9:27PM

What do the *doctors* know?!

Nothing! Anyway, they're too busy learning to be accountants right now, thanks to Lansley.

I know - let's ask McDonalds ©, CocaCola © and Walkers Crisps © to write us some obesity policy!

Thank god there will be no conflict of interest....

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[Crookes](#)

14 April 2012 9:27PM

I bet tomorrow's tabloids will have the headline We Are All Thin It Together...

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[Strummered](#)

14 April 2012 9:28PM

Do not expect anything from a government that promised -

No top down reorganisation of the NHS

and then charges £250 000 for dinner and policy influence

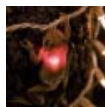
Beggars can't be choosers.

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[ClassyTramp](#)

14 April 2012 9:28PM

He's been in Downing Street for two years and *still* there are fat people. What a failure of a PM...

It is amusing to read the disparity between the headline and the article. Suggestions have been made. Doctors haven't "turned on No. 10".

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[Lianna](#)

14 April 2012 9:29PM

I would have thought the government would be happy we're getting fatter. We're more likely to die young and not get a pension or spend decades in a care home.

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[youarehavingalough](#)

14 April 2012 9:30PM

Response to [YOCAMERON](#), 14 April 2012 9:27PM

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" David Cameron does appear to have put on a rather large amount of weight since becoming PM. It's no doubt due to all those lavish dinners for donors"

Are you saying that Ed and his unions pay masters meetings are somehow low carb ?



karhu
14 April 2012 9:30PM

a society tha

t he defined as "obesegenic" – an environment that positively encourages the gaining of weight.

Perhaps not just due to eating, but sitting for too many hours in front of screens, including computer screens reading "Comment is Free".

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Cryogenic
14 April 2012 9:30PM

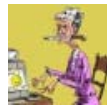
Do you want lies with that?

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BBZaph
14 April 2012 9:31PM

I'm sorry but I need a government - whether Tory or Labour, to tell me what every adult who can read and write knows ... drinking and eating badly is not good for your health. Eat too much/exercise too little = being overweight. On the one hand people bitched when Labour introduced no smoking in public places - now doctors are bitching at the PM because people eat too much. Why don't people just take responsibility for their own lives and take responsibility for their children?

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youarehavingalough
14 April 2012 9:31PM

Response to [maggieTee](#), 14 April 2012 9:28PM

"Are you suggesting Eric Pickles is a closet Labour supporter?"

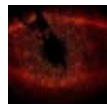
Eric is not a good example I have to admit

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RedGiant23
14 April 2012 9:31PM

Looking forward to seeing Cameron sit in the VIP box during the olympics and soaking up the media attention, telling everyone about the "Legacy" he has planned for so long.

There is the fast food comapnies, but do not also forget how he wanted to reduce the amount of PE undertaken at schools, the selling of sports facilities (though all parties are guilty of this).

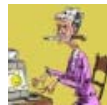
He should never be allowed to forget the above during the Olympics and the political brown-nosing he will no doubt be involved in!

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BBZaph
14 April 2012 9:32PM

Sorry ... meant to say I don't need a government

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[cantgetagoodusername](#)
14 April 2012 9:32PM

To deal with this we must never allow any junk food into our schools. I teach at a mixed comp where it saddens me daily to see how many kids are hyper on crisps, chocolate, sugar drinks etc. For many poor kids this I am sure is often their first substantial meal of the day. It is awful for their concentration let alone their waste lines. Sadly our school system currently turns a blind eye to the problem.

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[sadsadzoo](#)
14 April 2012 9:33PM

Didn't the Doctors already turn on No.10 over the health bill? In order to turn again they'd have to spin 360 degrees in addition to the 180 degrees that they have already turned, assuming they hadn't started from a turned position in the first place. It's like something Mick Jagger would do.

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[jonthepom](#)
14 April 2012 9:33PM

Since representatives of these food corporations are advising the government on school diets it is hardly surprising to see the results ie bigger profits for the companies and bigger health problems for the rest of us. Lucky the newly privatised health boards will soon be able to contract out their catering to these very same companies and there will be another captive market created.

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[kaff](#)
14 April 2012 9:34PM

It would be so simple to improve the nation's health by banning wheat consumption, but that would demand a generalized force of spirit and cultural change greater by miles than stopping people smoking.

Oh and all those happy farmers with their hectares of crops, they need us to eat their [poisonous gluten](#). Just look it up.

I'm not sure if corn starch (Maize) is that top tops either, kids State Side are getting liver disease with all the corn based starch in their soft drinks. Google it, I've been working so hard today.

Oh, and pure carb foods (wheat and similar grains) are bad for diabetics, especially those healthy fruit juices - worse even than chips. For the obese, read the same.

Come back lard and eggs, all is forgiven.

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[Gelion](#)
14 April 2012 9:34PM

Response to [LSE2002](#), 14 April 2012 9:23PM

LSE2002

14 April 2012 9:23PM

If you resolve to give up smoking, drinking, fast food ... you don't actually live longer; it just seems longer,..."

Unfortunately all the things you mention are hugely addictive.

White Sugar, Fat and Salt as as addictive as alcohol. Try giving any of those 3 up - it is very hard. And of course fast and processed food are stuffed full of them to make you buy them.

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[YOCAMERON](#)

[Recommend?](#) (223)



14 April 2012 9:34PM

youarehavingalough

14 April 2012 9:30PM

Response to YOCAMERON, 14 April 2012 9:27PM

" David Cameron does appear to have put on a rather large amount of weight since becoming PM. It's no doubt due to all those lavish dinners for donors"

Are you saying that Ed and his unions pay masters meetings are somehow low carb ?

Ah, but you missed the point. Ed isn't paid £250,000 by the unions. Cameron is paid £250,000 by any wealthy person who would like to determine government policy. I think that's called CORRUPTION.

Responses (2)

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utahsaint

14 April 2012 9:35PM

If only we could go back to the days before May 2010 when our environment wasn't obesegenic, no one was fat and macdonalds didn't sponsor large parts of the Labour Party conference, including the breakfast meetings!!

Thank goodness we have the doctors lobby to look out for our health this weekend and hold these evil politicians to account. Doubles (chins) all round!

Recommend? (60)

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tommoELbommo

14 April 2012 9:35PM

This gov will only act once the cost of obesity is proven to outway the costs associated with tougher action (in terms of taxation revenue and direct gov expenditure). For all the glib talk of health and wellbeing, modern governments care not; health is a neo-liberal territory like any other, this will be a cost/benefit analysis on their part and nothing more.

Recommend? (47)

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RoyalSuperiorityUK

14 April 2012 9:35PM

I'm buying shares in salt, sugar, butter, beef, wheat and chocolate. Eat and make me rich!

Recommend? (19)

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mackacavs

14 April 2012 9:35PM

Or, I know it's an out-there idea, but couldn't people just eat less?

It's not David Cameron's fault you're fat - It's your fault you're fat.

Recommend? (164)

Responses (2)

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jiggerred

14 April 2012 9:38PM

Response to youarehavingalough, 14 April 2012 9:30PM

You're forgetting about all those tory fatcats....

Recommend? (39)

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Quaestio

14 April 2012 9:38PM

Recommend? (25)

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Remarkable call to action... met with a massive shrug.

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weegie
14 April 2012 9:42PM

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The obese are our best citizens; they have done exactly what has been demanded of them at every moment of the day and night, consume, consume, consume. Now they are disabled by their excesses, the disapproving regard of society is turned on them - you monsters!

It is monstrous - it is the mirror of what we have become.



Hexdoll
14 April 2012 9:44PM

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As someone who lost 4st last year (no special method just reading labels and calorie counting) I can say one of the problems is portions I found that a lot of things that I would assume to be one serving were actually multiple servings and the calorie count and percentages displayed prominently was for one serving. As I also found out you can eat a ridiculously unhealthy diet and still be OK in terms of calories, for example you could eat only chip sandwiches as long as you don't eat too many. Putting the nutritional information as percentages of daily intake is misleading because different people have different calorie requirements and the packaging tends to assume a daily calorie intake (usually 2000kcal) which is more than what some people should be eating based on their activity level. Advertising of things that are mostly sugar as "low in fat" and things that are mostly fat as "low in sugar" is a problem too.

Encouraging people to exercise whilst good is not an effective way to lose weight, it is far easier to do this by reducing food intake. The evidence shows that people stop exercising because they get fat and not the other way around. [Time Magazine - Why Exercise Won't Make You Thin](#)



YOCAMERON
14 April 2012 9:44PM

[Recommend? \(76\)](#)

[Responses \(3\)](#)

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youarehavingalough

14 April 2012 9:27PM

Tory supporters are usually less fat than Labour supporters so maybe Ed is the one to talk to about this one

Try telling Eric Pickles or Nicholas Soames that.



giveusaclue
14 April 2012 9:44PM

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[Responses \(0\)](#)

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Is this obesity lark a new thing then? Let me guess, it started about 22 monts ago, right?

I admit to being overweight. Whose fault is it? MINE.



kaff
14 April 2012 9:45PM

[Recommend? \(52\)](#)

[Responses \(1\)](#)

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Response to [Gelion](#), 14 April 2012 9:34PM

LSE2002

14 April 2012 9:23PM

If you resolve to give up smoking, drinking, fast food ... you don't actually live longer; it just seems longer..."

Unfortunately all the things you mention are hugely addictive.

Wheat contains opiates... highly adictive...



VSLVSL

14 April 2012 9:45PM

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Response to [youarehavingalough](#), 14 April 2012 9:30PM

youarehavingalough

14 April 2012 9:30PM

Response to YOCAMERON, 14 April 2012 9:27PM

" David Cameron does appear to have put on a rather large amount of weight since becoming PM. It's no doubt due to all those lavish dinners for donors"

Are you saying that Ed and his unions pay masters meetings are somehow low carb ?

Seems odd that you constantly refer to "union paymasters" as if sponsorship of Labour MPs were either unknown to people or somehow something which we may disapprove of (we don't, and it's publicly available information).

Remind us again, which party is it that's been embroiled in a scandal for surreptitiously selling access to the Prime Minister for £250,000 per head.

Ah yes, I've remembered - why it was the Conservative Chairman who was offering dinners for donors.



giveusaclue

14 April 2012 9:46PM

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ps Wwas it only yesterday that people were commenting on here that if they wanted to smoke they would do and what business was it of the government to try and stop them?



kiwi99

14 April 2012 9:47PM

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Fast foods do not make you fat. Eating too much makes you fat and taking no exercise can make you fat. Get off your lardy-arses, cook at home, eat plenty of fruit and veggies. How hard is that? Nobody forces me to eat crap there are plenty of choices - so use your noggin and take care of yourself. McDonald sponsorship or advertising has not affected me in 20 years. Stop regulating us to death - just don't buy them and they'll go out of business or they will adapt. Grow up people and think for yourself.



giveusaclue

14 April 2012 9:50PM

Response to [jiggerred](#), 14 April 2012 9:46PM

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stevetyphoon

14 April 2012 9:50PM

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The whole corporate sponsorship of the Olympic Games is a massive sell out. Why won't the organising committee admit to how many seats are allocated to Coca-Cola, McDonalds etc etc?

The fact that the likes of these companies are allowed to sponsor an event dedicated to the super fit just shows how low corporate bum sucking Britain has sunk.



[cantgetagoodusername](#)

14 April 2012 9:50PM

Response to [kiwi99](#), 14 April 2012 9:47PM

It is refreshing to hear someone talk some sence... thank you kiwi99!

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[brenzone](#)

14 April 2012 9:50PM

"bold and tough" measures. Very easy if there's a will for it. Simply replace the present chaotic free market by command economics. This can be achieved just by planning prices so as to raise the demand for healthy option and lower demand for the crap. For example, beef burgers are deemed cheap by the ordinary person, so is dried macaroni & powdered cheese (just add water). On the other hand, fresh fish, fruit and veg are deemed - and actually are - expensive. So, adjust the prices to shift the demand. Things like production costs need to be managed by subsidies, which can be paid for by increasing the prices of the crap and use thart revenue to make healthy stuff cheaper. If, say, a kilo of fatty bacon is priced at £5 and a kilo of lean bacon at, say £2.50 the desired healthy alternative will be readily chosen. A kilo of frozen chips, say, £5 and a kilo of fresh mangoes or lychees, say 99p. I'm absolutely certain that this kind of intervention in the chaotic market will bring about the desired results. I'm all for a planned economy rather than the present free market mayhem with all the mass misery and health risks involved. Y'can take yer free market and shove it as far as I'm concerned - it is increasingly incapable of meeting the needs of the world today.

[Recommend?](#) (79)

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[fudgepot](#)

14 April 2012 9:50PM

Response to [BBZaph](#), 14 April 2012 9:32PM

I do love me some Freudian slip.

[Recommend?](#) (8)

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[ClassyTramp](#)

14 April 2012 9:51PM

Response to [BBZaph](#), 14 April 2012 9:31PM

I'm sorry but I need a government - whether Tory or Labour, to tell me what every adult who can read and write knows ... drinking and eating badly is not good for your health.

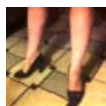
Shhh, you're spoiling it for everyone. People are enjoying a bit of outrage here, it's the Mail's alter-ego.

[Recommend?](#) (72)

[Responses](#) (0)

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[Zwoman48](#)

14 April 2012 9:51PM

It would help if healthy food were not so expensive.

[Recommend?](#) (75)

[Responses](#) (1)

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[musicitone](#)

14 April 2012 9:52PM

This is a great example of joined up thinking by the Government - the fatter we are the more unhealthy we become so we need to use those nice private hospitals, that are coming to an NHS near you soon, to make us better!
Be part of the revolution - stop eating junk and get on your bike (oops another bloody Tory mantra.....)

bedtime!

[Recommend?](#) (26)

[Responses](#) (0)

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conanthebarbarian
14 April 2012 9:53PM

[Recommend?](#) (45)

[Responses](#) (2)

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Apparently during The Olympics we are all LEGALLY OBLIGED to eat McDonalds and drink Coca Cola. You heard it here first.

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