

# Nourishing Britain

*A Political Manual for Improving  
the Nation's Health*

How to keep a secret  
**George Osborne**

They lobbied me hard  
**Andy Burnham**

Jamie Oliver made me do it  
**Sir Tony Blair**



By Dr Dolly van Tulleken and Henry Dimbleby  
Edited by Jemima Lewis

***The link between the food we  
eat and our health crisis:  
what employers can do to help***

***By Dr Dolly van Tulleken***  
*Co-author, Nourishing Britain*

***8<sup>th</sup> May 2025***

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***The UK is a world-leading Ultra-Processed Food (UPF) consumer***

# Who consumes ultra-processed food? A systematic review of sociodemographic determinants of ultra-processed food consumption from nationally representative samples

Age		Country (%kcal UPF)	Associated with higher UPF intake	Not associated with higher UPF intake	Country (%kcal UPF)	Associated with higher UPF intake	Not associated with higher UPF intake
Gender		Australia (39-42%)	  	 	Korea (24-27%)	  	 
Race / Ethnicity		Barbados (41%)		 	Mexico (19-30%)	  	
Income		Belgium (30-33%)	 	 	Netherlands (61%)	  	
Education		Brazil (21-30%)	   		Portugal (22-24%)	   Males:	  
Socioeconomic status / Occupation		Canada (45-48%)	  	  	Spain (24-31%)	    	
Food insecurity		Chile (29%)	  	 	Switzerland	   	 
Marital status		Colombia (16%)	  		UK (53-58%)	   	 
Household status		France (31%)	     	 	US (54-59%)	     	
Rural / Urban living	 	Italy (18%)	    		European countries (14-44%)	 1/22	 21/22
Region of country		<div> <div>UPF intake (% kcal)</div> <div> <div>&gt;60</div> <div>50-60</div> <div>40-49.9</div> <div>30-39.9</div> <div>20-29.9</div> <div>&lt;20</div> </div> <div> <div>Lower</div> <div>Higher</div> <div>Lower and higher</div> <div>Mid</div> </div> </div>					
Immigrant status / Country of birth		55 studies across 32 countries Newcastle-Ottawa Risk of bias: 5.7/10					
Indigenous identity		Dicken et al., 2023. Nutrition Research Reviews					

***UK average diet =  
almost 60% UPF***

***Adult obesity in the  
UK = 28%  
(compared to  
France 16% and  
Japan 5%)***

Source: House of Commons  
Library Obesity Statistics (2025)

# Why we created Nourishing Britain



## National Food Strategy

Independent Review

# THE PLAN.



*Original Scholarship*

## Is Obesity Policy in England Fit for Purpose? Analysis of Government Strategies and Policies, 1992–2020

DOLLY R.Z. THEIS\* and MARTIN WHITE\*,†

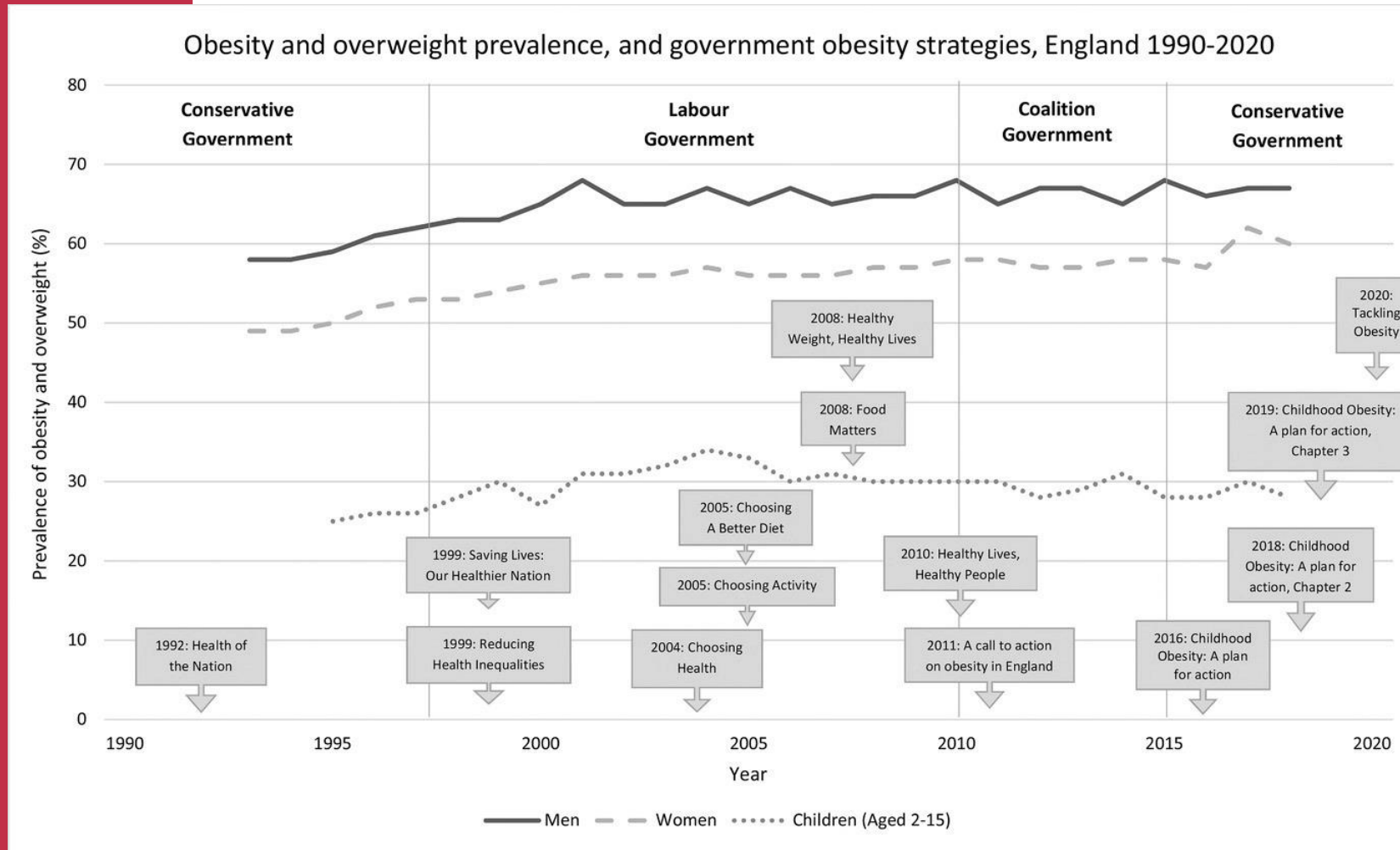
*\*Centre for Diet and Activity Research and MRC Epidemiology Unit,  
University of Cambridge; †Bennett Institute for Public Policy, University of  
Cambridge*

### Policy Points:

- This analysis finds that government obesity policies in England have largely been proposed in a way that does not readily lead to implementation; that governments rarely commission evaluations of previous government strategies or learn from policy failures; that governments have tended to adopt less interventionist policy approaches; and that policies largely make high demands on individual agency, meaning they rely on individuals to make behavior changes rather than shaping external influences and are thus less likely to be effective or equitable.
- These findings may help explain why after 30 years of proposed government obesity policies, obesity prevalence and health inequities still have not been successfully reduced.
- If policymakers address the issues identified in this analysis, population obesity could be tackled more successfully, which has added urgency given the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sources: National Food Strategy (2021) and Theis and White (2021)

# ***30 years of failed government obesity policy in England...***



***14 government obesity strategies***

***689 individual policies***

***NO reduction in obesity or related health inequalities***

Source: Theis and White (2021)



# Example policies aimed at employers

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROMOTING HEALTHY EATING

### Health Education Authority

### Food producers, manufacturers and retailers

- continuing to develop nutrition education resources for health professionals and for the public
- increasing further the variety and availability of manufactured foods with lower saturates, fat and sodium content than in current versions
- reformulating more standard foods as far as practicable to reduce saturates, fat and sodium
- offering throughout the country plentiful and easily accessible supplies of starchy staples, vegetables and fruit
- moving at an early date to full nutrition labelling
- developing marketing practices more conducive to healthy food choices

### Caterers

- offering menus which enable and encourage people to choose healthy diets
- using Government nutritional guidelines
- identifying models of healthy catering practice and disseminating them throughout the catering network
- ensuring adequate nutrition education and training of professional and other catering staff

*"Others with opportunities to contribute include ... employers and employees in the workplace"*

*"The NHS has a significant contribution to make ... and also as an advocate for health and as an employer." (1992)*

*"Develop code of best practice for employers and businesses on how to encourage and support employees who breastfeed." (2008)*



*"We will also launch a conversation with employers to understand better how we support people to be healthier whilst they are at work." (2020)*

*"The Government will sponsor debate on corporate citizenship across the public sector that leads to firm recommendations for action for all public and private sector employers, to demonstrate how they can organise their activities in ways that improve the health of employees and the wider community." (2004)*

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***Why are the politics of  
food policy so hard?***



Key: Name colour indicates political party

# Who we interviewed

People in order of most relevant time in office



**William Waldegrave**  
**1990-1992**



**Virginia Bottomley**  
**1992-1995**



**William Hague**  
**1997 - 2001**



**Tony Blair**  
**1997 - 2007**



**Alan Milburn**  
**1999 - 2003**



**Patricia Hewitt**  
**2005 - 2007**



**Alan Johnson**  
**2007 - 2009**



**Andy Burnham**  
**2009 - 2010**



**David Cameron**  
**2010 - 2016**



**Nick Clegg**  
**2010 - 2015**



**George Osborne**  
**2010 - 2016**



**Andrew Lansley**  
**2010 - 2012**



**Michael Gove**  
**2010 - 2014, 2017-2019**



**Jeremy Hunt**  
**2012 - 2018**



**Seema Kennedy**  
**2019**



**Matt Hancock**  
**2018 - 2021**



**Boris Johnson**  
**2019 - 2022**



**Jo Churchill**  
**2019 - 2021**



**Sajid Javid**  
**2021 - 2022**



**Sadiq Khan**  
**2016 - present**

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They talked me hard  
Crisis  
Janet Oliver made me do it  
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# What we found...

All 20 politicians agreed:

- Food-related ill health was a big problem.
- The government had not done enough to tackle obesity and food-related ill health.
- The government can and should do more.

*“[This] agenda is really, really, really ripe now.”*

**Sir Nick Clegg, former Liberal Democrat deputy prime minister**



*“What’s the point of occupying Number 11 Downing Street, or indeed Number 10 Downing Street if you’re not doing something with it?”*

**George Osborne,  
former Conservative chancellor**

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# The four main barriers politicians face

## 1. Merrie England versus the Nanny State



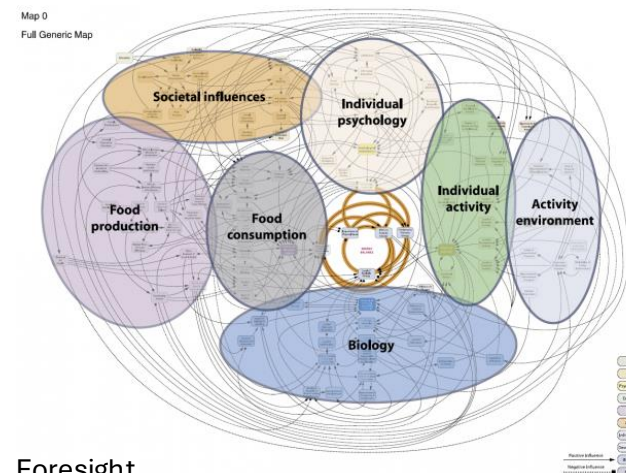
## 2. Mixing Business with Politics



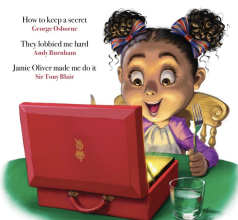
## 3. The Struggle to Juggle



## 4. Whack-A-Policy



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Sources: Guido Fawkes, Simon Baynes MP website, Wikipedia, Foresight

# Ingredients for Success

*Despite the challenges, the politicians were not at all defeatist.*

*On the contrary, they were brimming with optimism, ideas and advice for future governments.*

*We identified four ingredients for success.*

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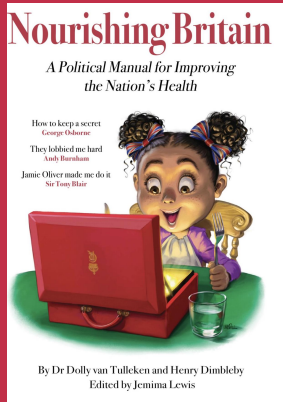
*“The first thing you have to try and do politically is to make sure that parliamentarians and others understand that this is not wishful thinking. That there is a solution to this problem, that it’s not too big to resolve.”*

Alan Johnson,  
former Labour health secretary

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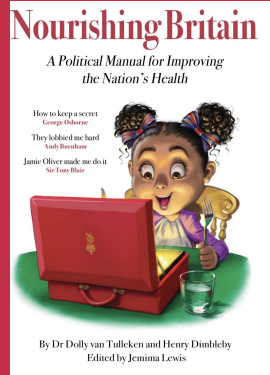


# ***How YOU can nourish Britain***

- ***Catering***
- ***Cooking***
- ***Breastfeeding***
- ***Pay***
- ***Partnerships***







# Don't leave office eating regretti spaghetti

*Politicians urged their successors not to leave office wishing they'd done more.*

*Some talked about not being bold enough when they were in office, while those who did a lot said they were immensely proud.*

*"We were pondering on [a sugar tax], but we were never really bold enough to do it."*

**Alan Johnson, former Labour health secretary**



# Download the full manual and interview transcripts

[www.nesta.org.uk/report/nourishing-britain/](http://www.nesta.org.uk/report/nourishing-britain/)



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Transcripts



Dr Dolly van Tulleken



Henry Dimbleby



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