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CONTACT

Gemini Research
Department of
Behavioural
Science and Health,
University College
London
1-19 Torrington Place
LONDON,
WC1E 6BT, UK
FREEPOST (BSH_Gemini)

T: 020 7679 1263
F: 020 7679 8354
E: Gemini@ucl.ac.uk

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all year!



Gemini-Health and
Development in
Twins



@GeminiResearch

NEWSLETTER 2019



Gemini Team (from left to right): Alice Kininmonth, Dr Andrea Smith, Katelyn Sass, Dr Clare Llewellyn & Dr Silvia Pastorino. (Not pictured Dr Abi Fisher & Dr Alison Fildes)

Welcome to the 12th Gemini newsletter

2019 is the most exciting year for Gemini since 2012. For the first time in 7 years we are **collecting new information** from all the families. We are also asking the twins to tell us about themselves for the very first time.

Between 2018 and 2019 the twins started secondary school, which is a big deal for most children. During this time children gain independence, start to form opinions of their own and make more decisions for themselves. But as researchers we don't know much about how and why eating habits change as children mature. This is why Gemini is so important – Gemini will be the largest study to date into the development of eating habits in early adolescence. We want to encourage all Gemini families to take part in the next round of data collection. It doesn't matter if you only ever completed 1 or 2 questionnaires; any information you provide now is extremely valuable to us. See **page 2** for more about the next phase of our study.

New website and Facebook page

We have launched our new Gemini website - thank you to all of you who have given us such positive feedback on it! You can find us at the same address: www.geministudy.co.uk or www.geministudy.com. Our website is where you can access the online questionnaires and computer games for the new study (see **page 4**). We have also launched a new Gemini Facebook page (Gemini—Health and Development in Twins) to keep you updated, and allow families to share photos and stories (see **page 4**).

New members of the Gemini team

The Gemini team is growing, to support the new programme of research. We have 8 new members this year: Dr Silvia Pastorino, a research fellow (you can read an interview with her on **page 2**); Muftah Dagali and Lisa Heggie, both PhD researchers; Katelyn Sass, an intern from the US (you can also read an interview with her on **page 3**); and Laura Kudlek, Christina Coyle, Rosalind Wilson, and Jenny Hegarty, MSc Health Psychology research students.

Two more books featuring Gemini globally

In 2018 Dr Clare Llewellyn, our Director, published her first book ('**Baby Food Matters**') featuring Gemini research over the last 10 years. This year she published different versions of the book for parents in the US ('**An Appetite for Life**', published in April by The Experiment) and in Japan ('**Feeding for the first 1000 days**', published in October by Diamond Inc). 'An Appetite for Life' was 1 of only 3 books on infant/toddler nutrition listed in the top 50 '**must read parenting books for all parents**' by Book Riot, the largest independent editorial book site in North America.



Understanding how eating habits develop in adolescence

The aim of the next phase of Gemini is to understand why some children develop healthy eating habits, a good relationship with food, positive body image and high self-esteem, but others struggle and develop difficulties, during the transition from childhood to adolescence. As part of our research, we hope to learn more about why eating disorders and unhealthy eating patterns sometimes develop. This may make it possible to identify children who are at risk at an early age, and allow parents to put strategies in place to help prevent eating disorders from developing. We are also finding out more broadly how and why eating patterns change as children mature.

This important and much-needed research is funded by the UK charity MQ – Transforming Mental Health (<https://www.mqmentalhealth.org/mental-health>), and was featured in a special article in the Guardian newspaper on Christmas Day last year (<https://bit.ly/2NvSehd>)



Our short video explains why twins are so valuable to researchers for understanding how genes (nature) and environmental factors (nurture) shape behaviours such as eating patterns over development (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JBVc6aiXhTQ>).

Questionnaires, computer games and rewards

For the first time we have a new questionnaire for the twins, so they can tell us about their own thoughts, feelings and experiences, and a questionnaire for parents as well. With researchers from the University of Liverpool, we have also developed a new computer game for the twins and parents to play as part of the study. To say thank you for taking part, all families who complete the study will receive a **£10 online gift voucher**, and will be entered into a prize draw to **win a pair of iPad minis** (5 families will win these). You can find out more about the study by visiting our new website: www.geministudy.co.uk.

NEW POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCHER

Hello, I'm Dr Silvia Pastorino and I joined Gemini in January 2019 after working at Cambridge University. I have always been fascinated by how we can change our health by the simple act of eating, and by how and when eating habits develop and become established.

What does your research focus on?

My research focuses on how unhealthy eating patterns develop in early adolescence, such as dieting, skipping meals, or even symptoms of eating disorders. I will examine how genetic factors, environmental factors (such as bullying and social media), and children's own characteristics (such as their early life appetite) shape the development of unhealthy and healthy eating patterns as children move into adolescence.

Why is your research important?

This research may help to identify children at higher risk of developing eating problems, and may highlight environmental factors that can be targeted to help prevent them.



*Dr Silvia Pastorino,
Research fellow*

HOME ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH



*Gemini PhD Student:
Alice Kininmonth*

As many of you will remember, in 2011 when your twins were 4, we telephoned you to ask about aspects of your home and family life. We were delighted to talk with over 1000 families as part of this work. Thanks to your time and efforts, we have been able to make some important discoveries into how the early home family environment influences children's growth. For example, Dr Stephanie Schrepff found that the genetic influence on weight was not as strong (39% compared to 86%) for children growing up in healthier homes with fewer sugary drinks and snacks high in sugar and/or fats, more opportunities for physical activity, and more rules around screen time. Our study is important because it shows that genes are not 'destiny' when it comes to a child's weight.

We are very excited to announce that we are planning to collect more information about the home environment and will be **contacting you again soon by telephone** now that your twins are 12 years old. These interviews will be led by PhD researcher Alice Kininmonth, whose research aims to understand how a child's home environment influences their eating habits and growth. We will also find out how family home environments change over time, from pre-school to early adolescence, and if a child's genetic predispositions (such as having a large appetite) are expressed differently in different home environments. Alice's PhD is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

We are really looking forward to speaking with many of you in person again. We would like to thank all the families who have been involved in this part of the study so far; we really appreciate your time and commitment. To allow us to speak with as many of you as possible, please do send us any updated contact phone numbers by visiting our website: www.geministudy.co.uk or by emailing gemini@ucl.ac.uk

INTERNATIONAL GEMINI TEAM MEMBER

Hi my name is Katelyn Sass. I'm originally from Decatur, Illinois, but was living in St. Louis, Missouri where I earned my Bachelor of Science.

How did you get involved with Gemini?

When I was offered a position to gain experience in the Gemini team and the chance arose for me to move from a small town in the United States to London, I was thrilled. I quit my job on a Monday, moved back home to my parents by Tuesday, and was on a plane to the UK by Wednesday.



Have you enjoyed working with the Gemini team?

Working on the Gemini Study has been a dream. I have gained so much through this experience. I've met new friends, travelled to new places, and learned so much about the 'behind the scenes' work that goes into the Gemini study, and research more broadly.

GEMINI IN 2019



Nathan & Aidan



Kaydence & Brayden



Evan & Owen

Proudly announcing the launch of our new Gemini website, Facebook page and YouTube!

This year saw the launch of our new Gemini Study website, although we have the same address as before (www.geministudy.co.uk). On this site you will find the new study questionnaires and games, and you can submit your regular height and weight measurements. You will also find some of the media coverage over the last few years, along with our podcasts, radio interviews, and a short BBC video clip with 5 top tips for parents of fussy eaters (under 'Publications' and 'Newsflash'). Under 'Blogs' you will find a few articles authored by our team, summarising Gemini research, and explaining why twins are such a valuable resource for researchers.

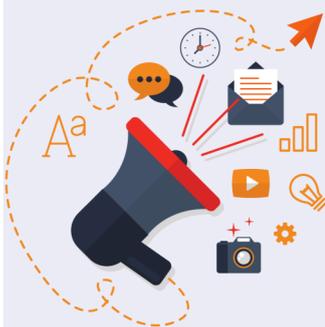
We have also launched a new Gemini Facebook page (**Gemini—Health and Development in Twins**). We will continue to keep you updated via our Twitter page ([@Gemini_Research](https://twitter.com/Gemini_Research)) and Youtube channel (**GeminiResearch**) too.



WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN UP TO IN 2019?

EXCITING PLANS FOR 2020?

We want to hear from you! We have just launched our official Facebook page and continue to run our Twitter page. Feel free to use our social media platforms to **share your photos with us** and other Gemini families, and keep up to date on the study. Please do submit some of your favourite snapshots, we love seeing pictures of the twins!



*Wishing each and everyone
one of you a happy holiday!*

From the Gemini Team

