

THIS ISSUE

- Gemini Team Updates
- Gemini Covid-19 Research
- iPad winners
- New Gemini Team Members
- Photo gallery
- Growth reminder

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Keep up to date with us
all year!



2020 NEWSLETTER



Gemini Team (from left to right): Back row; Dr Andrea Smith, Muftah Dagali, middle row; Karima Abdou, Dr Ali Fildes, Alice Kininmonth, front row; Lisa Heggie, Kristiane Tommerup. (Not pictured Dr Abi Fisher & Dr Clare Llewellyn)

Welcome to the 13th Gemini newsletter

2020 has been an unexpectedly eventful and challenging year for us all. The Coronavirus pandemic has dominated the news and had a massive impact on our daily lives. We know from speaking with many of you that the effects of lockdown, especially the closure of schools and lack of extracurricular activities, has been hard for Gemini families. We understand everyone is constantly having to adapt to changing and uncertain circumstances. But despite all these challenges, we are delighted to report that Gemini has continued to make progress, and we are more grateful than ever for your ongoing support. Importantly, this year also saw all the Gemini twins become teenagers – a milestone moment.

Happy News

Some of you may have noticed that Gemini Director, Clare Llewellyn, has taken a temporary step back this year. We are excited to announce that this is because Clare welcomed her baby daughter into the world in April. Meanwhile, Gemini Deputy Director Ali Fildes returned from maternity leave in January, following the arrival of her daughter last year.

New Gemini Team Members

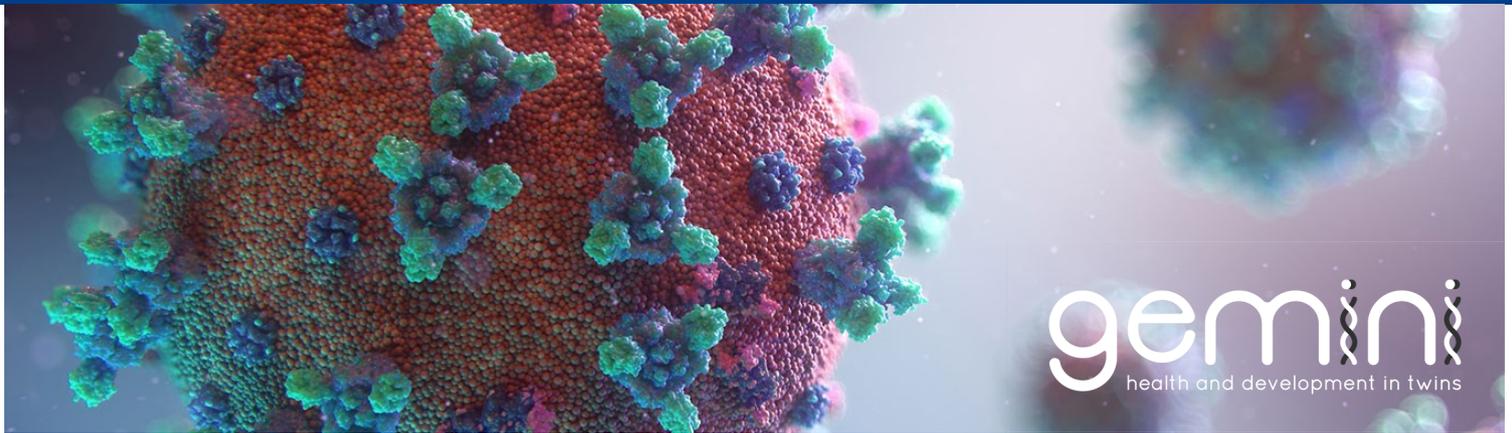
The Gemini team continues to grow. Kristiane Tommerup started her Gemini PhD in September, while Karima Abdou joined the team this autumn to work on a new COVID-19 related study (you can read all about this on **page 2**). We also have a group of five new MSc in Health Psychology research students supporting the study team.

Adapting to the 'new normal'

Like many others, the Gemini team has been working from home since March. Unfortunately, this meant we were unable to send our birthday cards by post this year. Instead, PhD student Lisa Heggie has designed monthly digital Birthday greetings for our Website, Facebook and Twitter accounts. Remote working also meant we needed to get creative with our 2020 team photo, so we held an online "photoshoot" during one of our virtual team meetings (see **top left of this page**).

Thank you

For the first time, the twins have been completing questionnaires themselves, to tell us about their own thoughts, feelings and experiences. The twin questionnaires, alongside questionnaires for parents, went online at the end of 2019 and printed versions were mailed out this summer. We really appreciate the time and commitment of all the families who have completed these questionnaires so far. To say thank you, families taking part received a £20 online gift voucher, and were entered into a prize draw to win a pair of iPad minis. You can see some of the lucky winners on **page 2**.



gemini
health and development in twins

Gemini During COVID-19

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 at the start of this year, we have all experienced major changes and disruptions to our lives. The Gemini team members have been working from home since March, from various locations around the U.K. including London, Leeds and Glasgow. However, during this time we have remained determined to keep our research progressing. We also quickly recognised the importance of gathering information about the experiences of Gemini families during the pandemic.

Exciting New Gemini Study

In July, Gemini Researchers Dr Ali Fildes and Dr Andrea Smith were awarded a [UK Research and Innovation COVID-19 Rapid Response](#) grant to investigate how the 'lockdown' restrictions have impacted the health, behaviour and wellbeing of Gemini twins and their families.



Gemini PhD student Alice Kininmonth paused her studies to work on this project full time and we have also recently welcomed a new researcher Karima Abdou to the study team.

Undoubtedly, COVID-19 has caused significant stress for families. Challenges have included income loss and school closures, along with fewer opportunities for socialising and sporting activities. However some families have also reported that the pandemic has led to a slower pace of life and greater opportunities to spend time with one another. The Gemini study is in a unique position to explore these issues. Just before 'lockdown' many Gemini families provided detailed information about their health, wellbeing and home environments by completing questionnaires and taking part in telephone interviews. We will use this information, along with large amounts of new information that we are collecting at the moment, to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on family environments and child health. We aim to present our findings to policy makers to help shape guidance that will improve the lives of children and their families. We want to thank all the Gemini families who have taken part in this important research and given up their time during this difficult period.

IPAD DRAW WINNERS

To thank all the families who completed the recent questionnaires about the twins' 'Transition into Adolescence' we ran a prize draw to win a pair of iPad minis. In June, we held our prize draw and contacted the lucky winners.

All the winning Gemini twins were extremely excited to receive their iPad's!



(From top to bottom, left to right: Teagan & India; Tom & Josh; Drew & Willow)

NEW GEMINI TEAM MEMBERS

Lisa Heggie: PhD Student

Hello Gemini families, I am pleased to meet you. My name is **Lisa Heggie** and I am a first-year PhD student, having gladly joined the UCL team earlier this year. As an undergraduate student I studied sport science at Edinburgh University, where I discovered my passion for food-related research. After a year-long trip to Australia, I returned home to Scotland to complete a master's degree in nutrition at Glasgow University.



What will your research focus on?

My research will investigate free sugars and sweeteners in the diets of children, focussing on how sugary and artificially sweetened foods and drinks affect growth, appetite and preferences for sweet-tastes. I am using information from the detailed diet diaries you kindly completed when your twins were two, and again when they were seven years old. Examining this information will help me understand how genetic and environmental influences shape sweet food intake in early life.

Why is this important?

My PhD is part of a larger project involving a network of scientists from across Europe, including the Netherlands, Spain and Greece. Together we are investigating the impact of sweeteners and sugar on health, aiming to answer the important question: "Can we safely use sweeteners instead of sugar in foods and drinks?". This research will inform public health policy on the use of sweeteners and will help shape how they are used in food or drink products in the future.

Muftah Dagali: PhD Student



Hi! I am **Muftah Dagali** and I joined the Gemini team in January 2020 to start my PhD. While I am new to the team, I am not new to UCL. I completed both my undergraduate degree in Biomedical Sciences and Master's degree in Clinical and Public Health Nutrition at UCL. I have always been keen to learn about what causes differences in children's growth and development. There is no better team to explore this topic with than the Gemini team.

What will your research focus on?

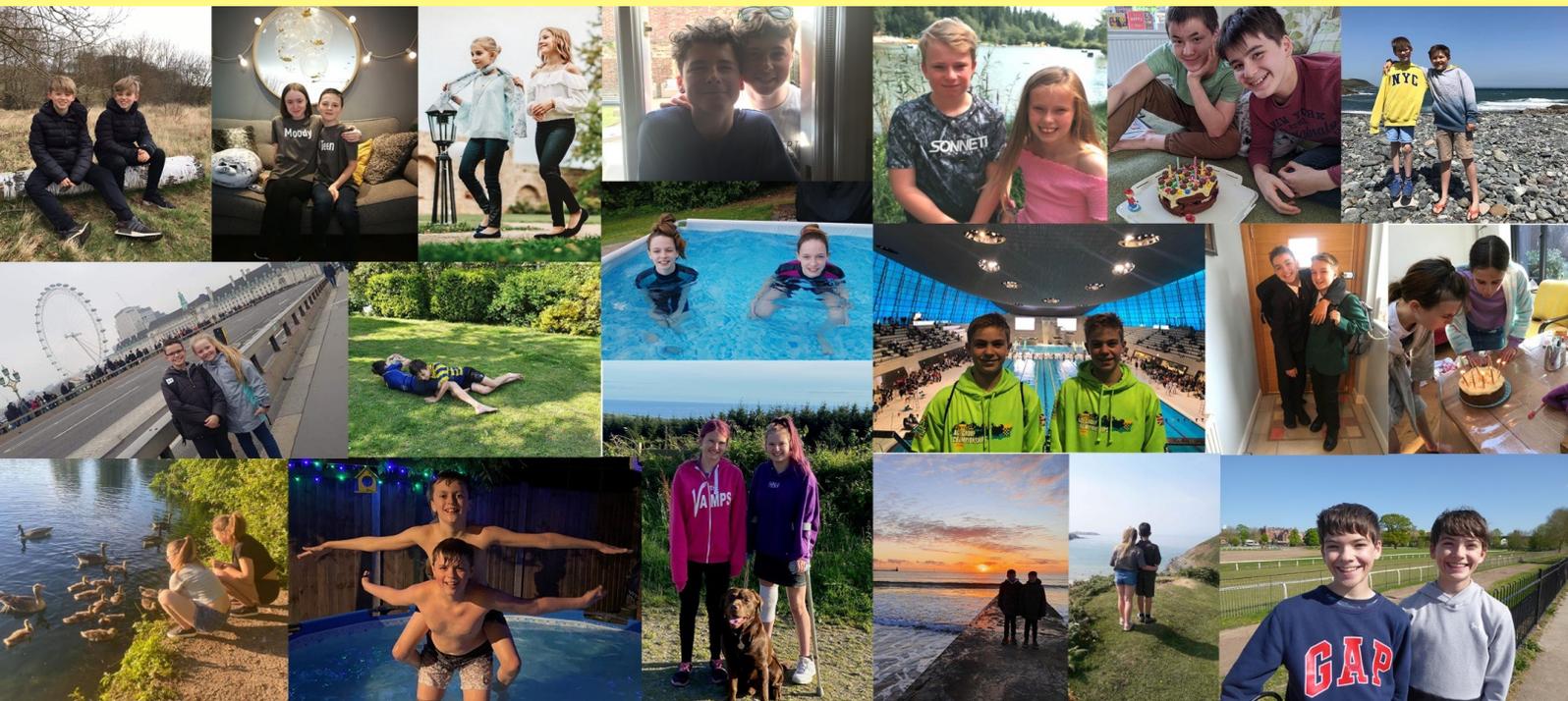
My PhD project will investigate how 'energy density' in children's diets influences weight and appetite from toddlerhood into early adolescence. Energy density is the amount of energy in a particular weight of food. For example, vegetables are generally considered to have low energy density, whilst foods like peanut butter or chocolate are much higher in energy density. I will

be using the diet diaries collected when the Gemini twins were two and seven years old for my project. Over the next three years, I will be using the twin design to investigate how important genes and the environment are in influencing the energy density of the foods children eat. I would like to THANK YOU all very much for providing all the information we need to answer these important questions.

Why is this important?

This is an essential research project because energy density is an aspect of children's diets that can be measured and changed. I hope my PhD project will produce findings that influence health policy and inform the foods children are given in settings such as nurseries or schools. Importantly, I want my work to support families to consume healthy diets.

GEMINI TWINS IN 2020



GROWTH REMINDER

We are continuing to collect height and weight information. Measuring the twins' heights and weights is an extremely important part of the study and this is true now more than ever. We are currently working on an important project where we will be exploring the growth patterns of the twins from birth to age 13. We need as many measurements as possible for this project, so please keep measuring your twins every 3 months and send these measurements in to us.

You can use our online form to submit measurements: <https://www.geministudy.co.uk/growth-measurements> or email them to us at: gemini@ucl.ac.uk

Thank you all for your continued support and for providing us with regular measurements.

GROWTH CHART

- Stand the child barefoot against this chart with his/her bottom and shoulder blades touching the wall but looking straight ahead.
- Rest a cereal pack/hardback book on top of his/her head and mark on this chart where the bottom of the packet/book is.
- Write the date by the mark.
- Weigh the child on the same day, write his/her weight by the date and repeat for each twin every 3 months.

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Wishing you a very happy holiday!



FROM THE GEMINI TEAM