

Study finds personal and Web-based support equal weight loss success

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Findings in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* on the largest weight loss maintenance study to date reinforce Kaiser Permanente's approach to obesity prevention. The combination of both personal contact and web-based support are identified as the key to successful, long-term weight management. Kaiser Permanente's Center for Health Research in Portland, Ore., was the coordinating center for the Weight Loss Maintenance Trial of 1,032 overweight and obese adults and provided five of the study co-authors.

"The big discovery of this study is that losing weight and keeping it off is possible if you have ongoing, long-term support," said study second author Victor J. Stevens, Ph.D. a senior researcher at Kaiser Permanente's Center for Health Research. "Everyone in this country – men, women, and children of every racial group – is getting heavier because our society promotes eating too much and not getting enough exercise. We all need a personal health coach, and hopefully health care systems can provide that. That's why Kaiser Permanente does research: to find successful programs that fit into routine medical care, and that's what this study shows."

The study, presented at the American Heart Association's Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Metabolism Council Meeting in Colorado Springs, Colo., found that brief personal counseling and web-based intervention strategies offer the best hope in keeping weight off over three years. Of the study's participants, 287 were from Kaiser Permanente's Northwest region.

“The takeaway message of this study for people wanting to keep weight off long-term is: adopt a healthy diet; focus on lifestyle changes you can sustain; reduce calorie intake; keep notes daily on how much you eat and exercise; set specific, realistic goals you can meet; seek encouragement from family, friends and co-workers to support your healthy choices; and remind yourself again and again of your original motivation and the health benefits of weight loss,” said lead author Laura P. Svetkey, MD, a professor of medicine at Duke University Medical Center in Durham, N.C. “People need to remember that even a few pounds of weight loss can have a big impact on health.”

The model used in the study mirrors some of the techniques and resources offered to Kaiser Permanente members.

“We know that frequent follow-up is best, so we try to make that as easy as possible with a weight maintenance newsletter with tips, tools and techniques from clinical findings, research and patient sharing, online programs to keep people connected electronically and help them keep an eye on portion size,” said Trina Histon, Ph.D., director of Kaiser Permanente’s Weight Management Initiative. The initiative provides Kaiser Permanente clinicians with weight loss tools for their patients. “We make it easy to get encouragement through the email your doctor tool and our online Balance Program at kp.org. We have to meet people where they are on the journey of weight loss and maintenance because people need different things at different times.”

Kaiser Permanente also helps promote obesity prevention in the community by supporting 30 farmers markets at Kaiser Permanente medical centers in six states, a Healthy Picks Vending Machine Initiative and TV Turnoff Week, as well as a Healthy Eating Active Living program in 27 communities across the US that makes it easier for people to choose healthy foods and get more active.

“Kaiser Permanente recognizes that good health requires more than exceptional health care at the doctor’s office or hospital. Health research like this benefits not only our members but the community at large – that’s why we extend our care by sharing our research to improve the health and well-being of our members and our communities,” said Raymond J. Baxter, Ph.D., senior vice president, Community Benefit.

Given that two-thirds of Americans are overweight or obese, these study findings are especially relevant.

“When your weight goes up, so does your blood pressure, risk of diabetes, stroke and heart disease, and wear and tear on your joints, back, hips and knees. Weight gain isn’t an aesthetics issue – it’s a health issue,” said co-author Stevens, a member of Kaiser Permanente’s Care Management Institute’s Weight Management Initiative (<http://www.kpcmi.org/weight-management/index.html>).

Source: Kaiser Permanente Division of Research

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