

Weight Loss 'Maintainers' Have Fewer TVs at Home

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(PhysOrg.com) -- What's the secret of success of people who lose lots of weight and keep it off for many years? A new study suggests predictable factors like exercise and control over eating play a role, but so do factors in the home like fewer TVs and more exercise equipment.

“The home environment really came out as a stronger factor than we would have anticipated,” said lead study author Suzanne Phelan, an assistant professor of [kinesiology](#) at California Polytechnic State University.

Phelan and colleagues examined surveys of 167 people in different areas of the United States who had managed to lose 10 percent or more of their body weight and keep it off for five years or more. Two other groups — one in Providence, R.I. and one in Philadelphia — were overweight or obese and had a history of dieting.

The researchers wanted to understand those who successfully had lost weight and “see what really set them apart from other obese people who haven’t lost,” Phelan said.

The study findings appear in the October issue of the *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*.

The researchers found that the weight-losers were 3.95 times more likely than the heavier individuals in the Rhode Island group and 2.85 times more likely than those in the Philadelphia group to exercise.

Weight-losers were also 1.63 times more likely than that first group and 1.41 times more likely than the second group to engage in what the researchers called “dietary restraint,” which Phelan describe as “cognitive efforts — thinking about your food, counting your calories, monitoring your intake.”

The successful weight-losers also had fewer TVs, more exercise equipment and fewer high-fat foods in the home.

“You have to pay attention to your home environment if you want to succeed,” Phelan said. “Do you have TVs in every room? When you walk into your kitchen, do you see high-fat food or healthy food?”

One of the groups of overweight people was made up of more minorities, and its members were less likely to eat breakfast and more likely to have TVs, Phelan said. Yet overall, she said she was surprised by how similar the two groups were. One was largely white, while the other was more diverse.

Dr. David Katz, director of Yale University School of Medicine’s Prevention Research Center, said the study leads to “common-sense” conclusions. “The findings here are close to self-evident,” he said.

However, study confirms “what some of us have been talking about for a long time” regarding successful weight loss, he said.

“If you want to choose better foods, keep better foods within reach. Don’t just rely on willpower. If you want to be more active, create opportunities for exercise that are always within reach. Don’t just rely on motivation,” he said.

Katz added, “We should be propagating the awareness that lasting weight control is about skill power, not just willpower.”

More information: Phelan S, et al. What distinguishes weight-loss maintainers from the treatment-seeking obese? Analysis of environmental, behavioral, and psychosocial variables in diverse populations. [Annals of Behavioral Medicine](#) 38(2), 2009.
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