

Depressed women can lose weight as successfully as others do

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Women with major depression were no less likely than were women without it to have successful results with a weight loss program, according to an article in the Winter 2009 *Behavioral Medicine*. Group Health Research Institute Senior Research Associate Evette J. Ludman, PhD, the study leader, concluded that weight loss programs should not exclude depressed people.

Dr. Ludman's study included 190 female Group Health patients age 40 to 65 with a [body mass index \(BMI\)](#) of 30 or more: 65 with major [depressive disorder](#) and 125 without it. The women had not been seeking treatment, but they enrolled in a one-year behavioral weight loss intervention involving 26 group sessions. The intervention, developed at the University of Minnesota over the past 20 years, has proven at least as good as any other currently available non-medical treatment.

Some previous research had hinted that [depression](#) might worsen outcomes in behavioral weight loss programs. That's why trials of weight loss interventions typically exclude people with major depression.

"We expected women with [major depression](#) to lose less weight, attend fewer sessions, eat more calories, and get less exercise than those without depression," Dr. Ludman said. "We were surprised to find no significant differences between the women who had depression and those who did not have it." Women had lost around the same amount of weight at 6 months (8 or 9 pounds) and 12 months (7 or 8 pounds), with no significant differences between the groups with and without

depression.

"Instead, what made a difference was just showing up," she said. Women who attended at least 12 sessions lost more weight (14 pounds at 6 months, and 11 pounds at 12 months) than did those who attended fewer sessions (4 pounds at both 6 and 12 months), regardless of whether they had depression. Being depressed didn't lead them to attend fewer sessions or lose less weight.

"Because of our findings and the well-documented health risks of obesity, we think rigorous efforts should be taken to engage and retain all women in need of such services in intensive [weight loss](#) programs," Dr. Ludman said.

For years, Dr. Ludman and her colleagues have been researching the link between depression and obesity. She is also the coauthor of a self-help workbook called *Overcoming Bipolar Disorder: A Comprehensive Workbook for Managing Your Symptoms and Achieving Your Life Goals*. Her Harvard coauthors include Mark Bauer, MD. Published in 2008, the book outlines the research-based Life Goals Program to help people live with bipolar disorder.

Source: Group Health Cooperative Center for Health Studies

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