

# New study finds attending Weight Watchers meetings helps reduce the risk for type 2 diabetes

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The 57 million Americans currently living with "pre-diabetes" could benefit from a group weight loss program, like Weight Watchers, according to a new study published in this month's *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine*. Researchers found that after a 6-month Weight Watchers group program, overweight or obese adults who attended at least two thirds of the weekly sessions, not only lost weight, but also significantly reduced fasting glucose and insulin levels - important indicators of diabetes risk.

Sixty-one overweight or obese men and women participated in a 6-month Weight Watchers study that included education on a lower calorie diet (a food plan), exercise (an activity plan) and weekly group support sessions. Not surprisingly, the researchers found that participants who attended the most sessions, had the most success, reinforcing the importance of group support in [lifestyle change](#). In fact, those who attended at least twenty of the twenty-four sessions, lost an average of 14 pounds and had the most dramatic change in glucose and [insulin levels](#) associated with diabetes risk, compared to those who attended few sessions.

"We know that previous research programs have successfully reduced diabetes risk using intensive lifestyle treatment," said Kathleen Melanson, PhD, RD, LD study co-author. "But what we didn't know is that a program that costs appreciably much less than specially-designed

diabetes prevention programs would have a profound impact on the same risk factors for type 2 diabetes. These findings could have important public health potential."

Type 2 diabetes is closely tied to obesity - and both conditions have increased dramatically over the past 20 years. There are now more than 23 million Americans living with [type 2 diabetes](#) in this country. Combined with those who have pre-diabetes, a condition that will likely lead to diabetes without any intervention, the toll on our healthcare system is extensive. According to the Centers for Disease Control, the total cost of treatment of diabetes in the United States exceeds \$200 billion, making treatment and prevention a priority for healthcare experts. Yet, the gold standard study on diabetes prevention, the Diabetes Prevention Program Trial (DPP), found that individual lifestyle interventions could reduce the risk of developing diabetes by more than fifty percent.

"Individual lifestyle intervention is obviously successful in reducing the risk for diabetes, but it comes at a high cost, and may not be realistic for all Americans," said Karen Miller-Kovach, RD, chief scientific officer for Weight Watchers International. "We're encouraged that the [Weight Watchers](#) program, already successful for helping millions of Americans lose weight, could also have the potential to reduce disease risk and even help reduce healthcare burden, for as little as about forty dollars per month, per person."

According to the American Diabetes Association, "structured programs emphasizing lifestyle changes including moderate weight loss (7% body weight) and regular physical activity (150 min/week), with dietary strategies including reduced calories and reduced intake of dietary fat, can reduce the risk for developing diabetes."

**More information:** Melanson KJ, Lowndes J. Type 2 diabetes risk

reduction in overweight and obese adults through multidisciplinary group sessions: effects of meeting attendance. American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine. 2010;4:275-281.

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