

# Supportive community programs can prevent women from gaining weight

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Women who attend programmes with ongoing support about healthy eating are less likely to gain weight and be more physically active than women who receive a one-off information session on dietary guidelines, finds an Australian study published in the British Medical Journal today.

Health problems related to obesity are major issues in developed countries. In Australia 60% of adults are overweight or obese. The [World Health Organisation](#) has recommended that weight management initiatives should include efforts to try and help adults from [gaining weight](#), even if they are in an acceptable range.

The study investigated whether women who attended the HeLP-her community lifestyle programme gained more or less weight than women who attended a single thirty minute group lecture about the benefits of following dietary and physical activity guidelines.

Women of reproductive age are an important target group, says the study, as they are prone to weight gain and they also have a strong influence on what their partners and children eat.

Two hundred and fifty adult women with an average age of 40 took part in the research, led by Professor Helena Teede from the Jean Hailes Foundation Research Group at Monash University in Melbourne. Women within the healthy weight range were included as well as overweight and [obese women](#).

One group (intervention) of 127 women attended the HeLP-her programme. This consisted of four one hour group sessions of 10-30 participants at a local primary school. The women were weighed, measured and completed questionnaires. Simple messages about [food intake](#) and physical activity were discussed, as were behavioural strategies such as problem solving, relapse prevention, self monitoring and personal goals. Follow-up support included regular personalised text messages. Participants returned after 12 months and were weighed and measured again.

The other group (control) consisted of 123 women who attended a lecture about healthy eating and the benefits of physical activity. No individual advice was given but participants were weighed and measured. The women were given a pedometer to use if they wanted to but were not set any personal goals. The participants were measured again 12 months later.

The results show that on average the control group gained 0.83kg (nearly 2 pounds) and this was not seen in the intervention group. Participants in the control group who were less than 40 with a healthy body mass index gained the most weight (1.72kg or over 3.5 pounds). In contrast, young participants in the intervention group lost around 0.27kg (half a pound).

After 12 months, the intervention group reported more vigorous physical activity than the control group. This group also had better results for tests linked to heart disease, such as cholesterol levels.

In conclusion, the researchers say: "Our findings suggest that excess weight gain in women may be prevented by using a low intensity community based programme that promotes self management and includes personal contact with ongoing remote support."

They add: "The HeLP-her intervention potentially bridges the gap

between intensive treatment programmes and broad population health strategies."

Provided by British Medical Journal

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