

'Love your body' to lose weight

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Almost a quarter of men and women in England and over a third of adults in America are obese. Obesity increases the risk of diabetes and heart disease and can significantly shorten a person's life expectancy. New research published by BioMed Central's open access journal *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity* shows that improving body image can enhance the effectiveness of weight loss programs based on diet and exercise.

Researchers from the Technical University of Lisbon and Bangor University enrolled overweight and [obese women](#) on a year-long weight loss program. Half the women were given general health information about good nutrition, [stress management](#), and the importance of looking after yourself. The other half attended 30 weekly group sessions (the intervention plan) where issues such as exercise, [emotional eating](#), improving body image and the recognition of, and how to overcome, personal barriers to weight loss and lapses from the diet were discussed.

On the behavioral intervention plan women found that the way they thought about their body improved and that concerns about [body shape](#) and size were reduced. Compared to the control group they were better able to self-regulate their eating and they lost much more weight, losing on average 7% of their starting weight compared to less than 2% for the [control group](#).

Dr Teixeira from Technical University of Lisbon, who led the research, said, "Body image problems are very common amongst overweight and obese people, often leading to comfort eating and more rigid eating

patterns, and are obstacles to losing weight. Our results showed a strong correlation between improvements in body image, especially in reducing anxiety about other peoples' opinions, and positive changes in eating behavior. From this we believe that learning to relate to your body in healthier ways is an important aspect of maintaining weight loss and should be addressed in every weight control program."

More information: "Body image change and improved eating self-regulation in a weight management intervention in women," *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*

Provided by BioMed Central

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