

More exercise, eating less fat and weight loss programs are in, popular diets are out

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Contrary to popular perception, a large proportion of obese Americans can and do lose weight, say researchers at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center. What's more, they say, the old tried and true methods of eating less fat and exercising are some of the most effective paths to weight loss success.

The research results appear in the April 10 online issue of the [American Journal of Preventive Medicine](#).

"This is great news because studies have shown that even a 5 percent reduction in weight can lead to improved health," says lead author Jacinda M. Nicklas, MD, MPH, MA, a clinical research fellow at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and Harvard Medical School. "With more than a third of Americans now obese and fifty to seventy percent of them trying to lose weight, this is important because the health risks associated with carrying that extra weight are substantial."

Nicklas and colleagues analyzed data from more than 4,000 [obese individuals](#) culled from the 2001-2006 National Health and [Nutrition Examination Survey](#) conducted by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) to assess the health and nutritional status of adults in the United States.

Individuals included in the study were over 20 years of age with a [body mass index](#) of 30 or more 12 months prior to the interview.

Of those surveyed, 2,523 individuals reported trying to lose weight. Forty percent of these said they experienced weight loss of 5 percent or greater, and another 20 percent lost 10 percent or more.

"Those who exercised more and ate less fat were significantly more likely to [lose weight](#)," say the authors. "Additionally we found a correlation between joining weight loss programs and greater reported weight loss, which may speak to the importance of structure in a weight loss regimen" says Nicklas. And while those who used prescription weight loss medications also reported weight loss success, this represented only a small number of [study participants](#).

In contrast, the authors found that, "self-reported use of popular diets, liquid diets, nonprescription weight loss pills and diet foods/products were not associated with weight loss."

"It's very encouraging to find that the most of the weight loss methods associated with success are accessible and inexpensive," says senior author Christina Wee, MD, MPH who conducts research on obesity and health disparities as the Co-Director of Research in BIDMC's Division of General Medicine and Primary Care. "There are lots of fad diets out there as well as expensive over-the-counter medications that have not necessarily been proven to be effective, and it is important that Americans discuss product claims with their doctor before trying such products."

This study did not look at the long-term impact of these interventions on an individual's ability to keep the weight off. The authors suggest that future research is needed to identify and address barriers to maintaining [weight loss](#).

More information: "Successful Weight Loss Among Obese U.S. Adults," by J.M. Nicklas, K.W. Huskey, R.B. Davis, and C.C. Wee

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