

# Poll of psychologists cites emotions as top obstacle to successful weight loss

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When it comes to losing weight, a popular New Year's resolution for many, people often focus on eating less and exercising more. But results of a new survey of psychologists suggest dieters should pay attention to the role emotions play in weight gain and loss if they hope to succeed.

The survey, conducted by the Consumer Reports National Research Center, asked more than 1,300 licensed psychologists how they dealt with clients' weight and weight loss challenges. When asked which strategies were essential to [losing weight](#) and keeping it off, psychologists cited "understanding and managing the behaviors and emotions related to [weight management](#)" as essential for addressing weight loss with their clients (44 percent). Survey respondents also cited "emotional eating" (43 percent) as a barrier to weight loss, and included "maintaining a regular exercise schedule" (43 percent) and "making proper food choices in general" (28 percent) as keys to shedding pounds. In general, gaining self-control over behaviors and emotions related to eating were both key, indicating that the two go together.

Ninety-two percent of the 306 respondents who provide weight loss treatment reported helping a client "address underlying [emotional issues](#) related to [weight gain](#)." More than 70 percent identified [cognitive therapy](#), problem-solving and mindfulness as "excellent" or "good" weight loss strategies. In addition, motivational strategies, keeping behavioral records and goal-setting were also important in helping clients to lose weight and keep it off, according to survey results. Cognitive therapy helps people identify and address [negative thoughts](#) and

emotions that can lead to [unhealthy behaviors](#). Mindfulness allows thoughts and emotions to come and go without judging them, and instead concentrate on being aware of the moment. The survey results will be reported in the February 2013 issue of *Consumer Reports Magazine* and online at [ConsumerReports.org](http://ConsumerReports.org).

"Anyone who has ever tried to lose a few pounds and keep them off knows that doing so isn't easy. The good news is that research and clinical experience have shown that, in addition to behavioral approaches, cognitive behavioral therapy that targets emotional barriers helps people lose weight," said Norman B. Anderson, PhD, chief executive officer of the American Psychological Association.

*Consumer Reports* surveyed 1,328 licensed [psychologists](#) who provide direct patient care in September 2012 about their work and professional opinions regarding weight loss. The online poll was designed by the Consumer Reports National Research Center in partnership with experts provided by the American Psychological Association. Survey participants were randomly selected from the American Psychological Association's membership file. The margin of error was +/- 3 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level. A total of 55 percent of the sample was female, and the median age was 59 years old.

"Although it is generally accepted that weight problems are most often caused by a combination of biological, emotional, behavioral and environmental issues, these new results show the key role of stress and emotional regulation in losing weight. Therefore, the best weight loss tactics should integrate strategies to address emotion and behavior as well as lifestyle approaches to exercise and making healthy eating choices," said Anderson.

Provided by American Psychological Association

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