

Weight loss counseling lifts depression in new study

April 25 2013, by Lisa M. Larson & Bryan Goodchild

(Medical Xpress)—Women struggling with clinical depression and obesity should consider a comprehensive weight loss program to significantly boost their mood, according to new research out of UMass Medical School published in the *International Journal of Obesity*.

In the randomized, controlled "Be Active" trial, 47 percent of women who participated in a diet and exercise program erased all signs of depression at one year. Sixty-seven percent of women in a second group—which received behavior therapy for depression followed by a shorter diet and [exercise program](#)—saw their depression resolve in a year's time.

Approximately 160 women, all of whom were dealing with obesity and depression, were recruited to participate in the two-year study. All participants received a 24-week comprehensive weight loss counseling from a [dietitian](#) and exercise [physiologist](#). Half of the [participants](#) received 10 weeks of behavior therapy for depression first, followed by a 16-week comprehensive weight program. Behavior therapy helps people with depression understand the impact of depression on their lives and to learn how to construct happier and more fulfilling lives.

Researchers found that both groups lost significant weight—about the same amount, even though the behavior therapy group spent less time focusing on weight loss. They also found that those who did not see a decrease in depression did not lose very much weight.

"Women with depression may benefit from a comprehensive [weight loss program](#) in terms of both their weight and depression," said Sherry Pagoto, PhD, associate professor of medicine and lead author on the study, "However if weight loss is slow or depression is not improving in the first few weeks, I recommend behavior therapy, which will very much increase the chance of recovering from depression."

Kathy Granados, 55, of Shrewsbury, took part in the group that included [behavior therapy](#) and weight loss counseling. She said she lost 39 pounds and found a new outlook on life.

"I'm a completely different person," Granados said. "I lost 39 pounds and I've kept off 35 of it. I used to be so insecure, feeling bad about myself and all that's changed. I still wish I could change a million things, but the good news is I feel I'm much kinder to myself than I ever was. That's the biggest change for me."

Granados said the onset of New England's snowy season has always meant a bout of depression for her, and along with it, weight gain.

"For some reason the winters are awful for me. I don't know what it is but I gain weight every winter," she said. "I go into a depression where I just go to work, come home, sit on the couch and can't do anything. I gain a lot of weight that way and I never take it off. When I heard about this study, I thought this is my chance."

"Weight loss counseling is good for your mood," said Dr. Pagoto. "If there is a concern about whether weight loss counseling is for you because you are depressed, we found it may have a very beneficial effect on your mood."

Provided by University of Massachusetts Medical School

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