

# Live Well RVA study takes aim at obesity

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Jessica LaRose, Ph.D.

(Medical Xpress)—A new study underway at Virginia Commonwealth University is focused on tackling obesity in young adults.

More than 40 percent of 18- to 25-year-olds in the United States are overweight or obese, according to "Trends in Adolescent and Young Adult Health in the United States," an article in the *Journal of*

*Adolescent Health.* And these rates soar even higher for minority [young adults](#), exceeding 50 percent for African-Americans and Hispanics/Latinos.

Jessica LaRose, Ph.D., assistant professor of social and behavioral health in the VCU School of Medicine, is investigating and comparing the efficacy of two programs that promote weight control and cardiovascular health in early adulthood. The study is called Live Well RVA.

"There is a gap in current research and clinical programs – we have gold standard weight management programs for kids as well as adults. This study is focused on developing programs for the transition from adolescence into adulthood, which is an important time for intervention," said LaRose, the study's principal investigator. "Even though this is a high-risk developmental stage, very few programs have been developed for this specific age group.

"We've spent the last several years conducting formative work with overweight young adults to learn from them how to adapt existing programs to better meet their needs. Live Well RVA is a result of that work – our current research represents the first test of a behavioral weight loss program specifically designed for this unique and at-risk age group."

The study, funded by the National Institutes of Health, is testing two 12-week [weight loss](#) programs designed for young adults. Both programs involve two individual sessions with a lifestyle counselor, followed by weekly lessons and personalized coaching and feedback from their counselor, all via a web platform to reduce time barriers.

One of the goals is to discern which program is more effective in promoting motivation and engagement – that is, which one is better at getting participants to stick with the program and make changes to their

behavior.

In the formative work, motivation and time were perceived as key barriers to weight management and participation in a healthy lifestyle program. Both of these programs were designed to address these barriers.

"We want participants to take more ownership of their own health behaviors," LaRose said. "Our goal is to help them learn to adopt strategies to lose weight, get fit and promote a healthier lifestyle. Based on what we've learned from this population so far, it is important to connect the participants' own values and goals with the behaviors we're promoting in the program for it to be successful."

In addition to providing preliminary data on the efficacy of the two approaches, the research team will be able to examine the impact of a brief [weight loss program](#) on other health outcomes, such as waist circumference, blood pressure and fasting glucose. Given the lack of treatment studies within this age group, these data don't exist. It is also not known whether changes in these health outcomes can be achieved through a brief, low-intensity program like this one.

"Given the low-intensity nature of these interventions, there is a great deal of potential for dissemination into other settings – college campuses, community settings, clinical care settings," LaRose said.

"These studies would provide effectiveness data in a real-world setting and hold the potential to have a broader public [health](#) impact beyond the individual-level intervention we are testing now."

**More information:** "Trends in Adolescent and Young Adult Health in the United States." Tina Paul Mulye, M.P.H., M. Jane Park, M.P.H., Chelsea D. Nelson, B.A., Sally H. Adams, Ph.D., Charles E. Irwin Jr., M.D., Claire D. Brindis, Dr.PH. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, Volume

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