

Weight loss efforts start well, but lapse over time

April 8 2014, by Glenda Fauntleroy



Learning you have an obesity-related disease motivates many to start a weight loss program, but troubling health news is often not enough to sustain weight loss efforts, finds new research in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

The study evaluated mostly male Veterans Affairs (VA) patients to uncover what motivated them to join the VA behavioral weight management program known as MOVE!, which has been offered to veterans at no cost since 2008. Researchers used data from over 45,000 veterans who received services in 2002 and who had BMIs over 30. Some had been diagnosed in the previous 6 months with diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and sleep apnea—all known to be co-

morbidities of obesity.

The researchers found that those who had joined the MOVE! program were 2 to 3 times more likely to have had a recent obesity-related diagnosis than those who didn't enter the program. Patients were also more likely to join if they had a weight gain of 3 percent or greater.

"A key take-away message for providers is that the onset of a weight-related health condition may provide an opportunity to broach the subject of [weight loss](#) and discuss the potential benefits of joining an evidence-supported behavioral [weight loss program](#)," said lead author Megan McVay, Ph.D., of the Durham Veterans Affairs Medical Center in North Carolina. "In the VA, such a program is available at no cost to veterans, but fortunately, other health care settings are beginning to offer these programs for low- or no-cost as well."

The study also revealed, however, that although gaining weight and new disease diagnoses motivated [veterans](#) to join, most did not continue the [program](#). Only 15 percent participated in more than eight sessions in six months.

"While researchers have examined other factors that may be related to sustained attendance at weight loss programs, we still have more to learn about what gets in the way of sustained engagement and how to help individuals overcome [the] barriers," McVay explained.

Lawrence J. Cheskin, M.D., director of Johns Hopkins Weight Management Center in Baltimore, said the behavior of the study's participants is not uncommon.

"Many of us will respond with good intentions when faced with a health crisis and challenge, but it is easy to put this behind us once the shock has passed and the reality that it is not easy or fun to lose weight

becomes clear," he said.

"Patients need to keep the reasons they want to change fresh in their minds, set attainable goals, and get ongoing support for their efforts," Cheskin added.

More information: McVay MA, Yancy WS, et al. "Obesity-related status changes and weight loss treatment utilization." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 2014

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