

Non-diet approach to weight management more effective in worksite wellness programs

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Problematic eating behaviors and dissatisfaction with one's body are familiar struggles among women. To combat those behaviors, which have led to higher healthcare premiums and medical trends, employers have offered worksite wellness programs to employees and their families. However, the vast majority of wellness programs limit their approach to promoting diets, which may result in participants regaining the majority of their weight once the programs end. Now, researchers at the University of Missouri have found that "Eat for Life," a new wellness approach that focuses on mindfulness and intuitive eating as a lifestyle, is more effective than traditional weight-loss programs in improving individuals' views of their bodies and decreasing problematic eating behaviors.

"Eat for Life offers a non-diet approach to weight management," said Lynn Rossy, a health psychologist for the UM System. "Traditional [wellness programs](#) focus on weight challenges in which [participants](#) are repeatedly weighing themselves. These actions can help participants initially lose weight, but often, people gain the weight back when the challenge is gone and the program is over."

Rossy says that weight cycling, losing weight and then gaining it back, is common in traditional wellness programs and can be more harmful than never losing any weight. Participants in the Eat for Life program are asked not to weigh themselves the entire 10-weeks of the program.

In the study, Rossy and her colleagues evaluated the effectiveness of the

Eat for Life program, which combines intuitive eating and mindfulness to assist participants in developing positive relationships with food and their bodies. Intuitive eating is when individuals learn to [eat](#), exercise and experience their bodies from their own internal cues, such as hunger and fullness, rather than external cues, such as calorie counting and [weight](#) scales.

"Intuitive eating and mindfulness are two relatively new intervention approaches that have been effective in supporting [healthy eating](#) and body image," Rossy said. "Eat for Life encourages individuals to become more engaged with their internal body signals and not the numbers on the scales."

Rossy found that women who participated in Eat for Life reported higher levels of body appreciation and intuitive eating and lower levels of problematic eating behaviors such as bingeing, purging and fasting, as compared to women who did not participate in the program. Eat for Life participants' weights ranged from normal to morbidly obese, and some women displayed eating disorder behaviors. At the end of the program, participants in the Eat for Life program were significantly more likely not to exhibit [disordered eating](#). Mindfulness was a major factor in all of the positive outcomes, Rossy said.

"Eat for Life is not just for individuals with eating disorders," said Rossy. "This type of intervention program is for a variety of individuals who want to have more knowledge on how to be healthy and how to appreciate their bodies' value."

Rossy's research, "Eat for Life: A Worksite Feasibility Study of a Novel Mindfulness-based Intuitive Eating Intervention," was published in the *American Journal of Health Promotion*.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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