

Physician recommendations result in greater weight loss, research finds

March 31 2015



Joshua Berning, an assistant professor at the University of Georgia, found that physician recommendations helped people lose more weight over a one-year period of time than those who did not receive a recommendation. Credit: Andrew Davis Tucker/University of Georgia

Patients advised to lose weight by their physicians dropped more pounds on average than those who didn't receive a recommendation, according to new research from the University of Georgia published in the journal *Economics & Human Biology*.

Using a national data set from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, study author Joshua Berning found that [physician](#) advice was associated with a reported 10-pound loss for women and a 12-pound loss for men over a one-year period, after controlling the data for numerous covariates. The diet and exercise habits of participants were also associated with [weight](#) loss.

"The data set also measures the number of people who were advised to [lose weight](#), regardless of whether or not they wanted to hear it," said Berning, an assistant professor of agricultural and applied economics in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. "That measure, of whether they were recommended to lose weight, makes this data unique."

The data also shows that physician advice may have different effects on [weight gain](#) and [weight loss](#).

"People often gain weight as they age," Berning said. "The recommendation of weight loss mitigated weight gain more than it facilitated weight loss."

The impact direct communication can have on obesity is powerful, he said, and the solution sounds easy enough. The problem Berning found is that many "physicians often don't take the time to consult [patients](#) about being overweight. They need to take the opportunity to interact with their patients. Through an open dialogue, patients can find solutions to their health issues, especially in terms of obesity."

Berning explained that the success of physician recommendation comes from getting a tailored opinion. Physicians are able to put a person's health into context by looking at factors beyond just weight or body mass index. Health care providers can assess multiple components—such as the diet, exercise and medical history—to determine if a patient is at

risk for obesity.

"If I talk to a physician, he or she can tell me about my current health and my health trajectory," Berning said. "Oftentimes we have a sense of complacency with our own health. A good physician can help us understand what kind of health trajectory we are on and how we can improve it."

Because of the personalized medical advice, physician visits have a distinct advantage over other weight-loss methods, like commercial weight-loss programs.

"Since commercial weight-loss programs are for profit, they can be prohibitively expensive," Berning said. "Health care provider advice is more affordable and achievable for a wider population. Doctors can identify obesity problems earlier on and build long-term relationships with their patients."

More information: The study on "The Role of Physicians in Promoting Weight Loss" is available at www.sciencedirect.com/science/...i/S1570677X15000131#

Provided by University of Georgia

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