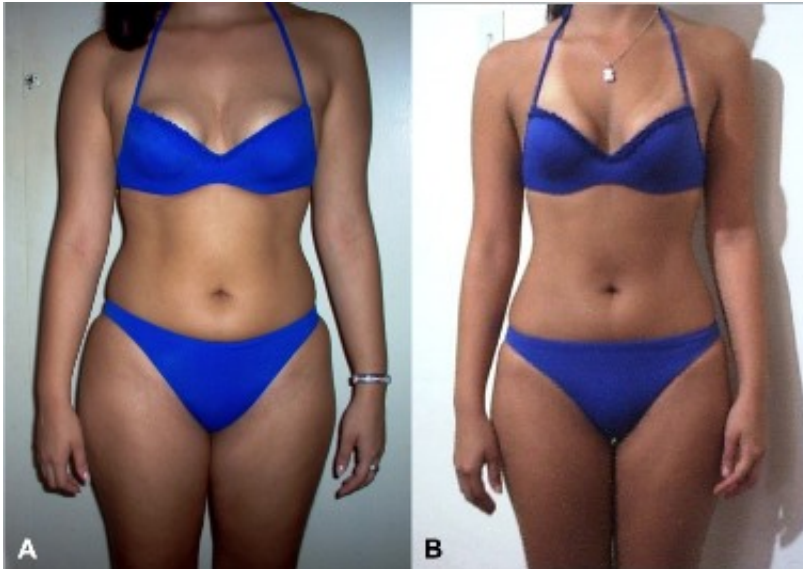


An image is worth a thousand kilos?

January 18 2016



Before and after photo

OK, so maybe not a thousand kilos, exactly, but a study at the University of Alicante shows how a photo diary can keep dieters motivated, making them more likely to achieve their target weight.

Isaac Elías Kuzmar Daza, a [medical professional](#) from Colombia and more recently PhD student at the Universidad de Alicante (University of Alicante, UA), studied the motivation levels of patients on [weight loss](#) programmes at a nutrition clinic in Barranquilla, Colombia.

Different measurements were taken of the patients each week, including

[body mass index](#), weight-to-hip ratio, food and exercise diaries, etc., to record their progress. In addition to these standard barometers of weight loss, full-body photographs were taken each week, which proved to be very motivating and a key factor in patients completing the full programme. Mercedes Rizo Baeza, Kuzmar's thesis director at the UA, explains: "After all, it is very gratifying to literally see yourself get slimmer over time".

Over the course of the sixteen-week programme, a full 90% of patients, aged between 16 and 72, saw the treatment through to the end, with 71.3% successfully meeting their weight loss objectives. Among those monitored, one measurement proved particularly motivating: waist circumference, one of the most visual elements.

This finding correlates with the fact that the majority of the patients who attended the clinic did so motivated by image, rather than any underlying condition (high cholesterol, heart condition, etc). It should be said that 233 of the 271 were female, and that this split accounts to a large extent –not entirely, but to a large extent– for this bias.

Another useful finding of this study was that patients did not necessarily need to attend the clinic in person for the programme to be effective. A support line was set up, which patients could call to submit their measurements. They also took and sent their own full-body photographs to the researcher. Fifty percent of patients completed the programme in this way, leading to no statistical differences in terms of either adherence or weight loss.

Summarising the findings, Rizo Baeza tells us: "What [patients](#) want is a photo, rather than cold numbers". These photos serve as visual confirmation that all their hard work is paying off, spurring them on to further weight loss.

More information: Isaac Kuzmar et al. Adherence to an overweight and obesity treatment: how to motivate a patient?, *PeerJ* (2014). [DOI: 10.7717/peerj.495](https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.495)

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