

Weight gain in rural women—what to do and how to prevent it

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On average, Australian women gain about one kilo in weight every year, so a 20 year old woman has a high risk of becoming obese before she reaches 50. This weight gain can be even greater in women in rural areas, who may not have access to gyms, personal trainers or even support groups.

A groundbreaking study by Monash researchers looking at ways to provide low cost, attractive interventions to prevent excess [weight gain](#) in Australian rural [women](#) has been published in *PLOS Medicine*.

The researchers, led by Associate Professor Cate Lombard, Head of Prevention and Population Health Research, Department of Nutrition and Dietetics, conducted the trial across 41 Australian towns. From October 2012 to April 2014, almost 650 women aged between 18 and 50 years were recruited into the one-year self management lifestyle intervention (HeLP-her) trial.

Those allocated to the group receiving the HeLP-her program received one group session, monthly SMS text message, one telephone coaching session and a program manual. The control group received one general women's health education session.

The study found that each of the women who participated in the HeLP-her program lost on average half a kilogram over the 12 month period. In comparison, the control group, on average, gained half a kilo over the year. This almost one kilogram difference between the two groups is important as this was a large study conducted in young healthy women who are generally unaware of small annual weight gain and the impact this has on increasing their risk of obesity.

According to Associate Professor Lombard, secondary outcomes of the HeLP-her program included improved diet quality. Additionally, participants were more likely to change to healthier lifestyle behaviours such as regular monitoring of weight, setting realistic goals and managing their food intake and physical activity.

Associate Professor Lombard said one of the standout results of the study was the importance of monthly text messages.

"These were simple reminders to eat more vegetables and fruit, to be more active etc and the feedback we got was that these were highly effective in making sure that rural women stayed healthy and on track," she said.

"There are significant long term health benefits if we can slow weight gain in all age groups in Australia particularly in young women. These benefits include reduced type 2 diabetes, heart disease, cancers and fewer complications associated with pregnancy and childbirth."

The study and control groups will be revisited by the researchers after another 12 month period, to determine how many women maintained the healthy behaviours of the HeLP-her program, and whether doing so resulted in weight maintenance/gain or loss compared to the [control group](#).

Provided by Monash University

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