

Initial testing of go/no-go 'boosting intervention' trials shows promise in helping people lose weight

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A team of researchers from Cardiff University, Radboud University and the University of Exeter has carried out a survey of "boosting

intervention" trials to find out how well such approaches work in helping people lose weight. In their paper published in the journal *Royal Society Open Science*, the group describes the idea behind the approach and the results.

Many people are overweight and find that their efforts to diet fail for various reasons. Governments and scientists have noted the so-called obesity epidemic, but have not come up with an effective way to prevent people from gaining [weight](#) or to help them lose weight. In this new effort, the researchers looked at a form of behavior modification called "boosting intervention" and its efficacy in [case studies](#).

The idea behind the approach is to have people who wish to attain a desired outcome engage repetitively in a type of behavior that will help them get there. One such approach involves engaging in go/no-go self-directed activities. These activities involve making small, positive choices on a periodic basis, while at the same time avoiding negative choices. The researchers found multiple studies designed to test how well the approach works as it applies to helping people lose weight. Some even involved the use of a smartphone app by volunteers. Such apps display both "positive" and "negative" foods. The user is supposed to click on the healthy foods and ignore those that are not healthy. And they are supposed to play the game for several minutes every day—training their brains to react positively to foods for that are good for them, while ignoring those that are not.

The researchers report that their survey of case study results involved a collective total of hundreds of volunteers. They also report that thus far, the approach appears promising. More specifically, they found that volunteers participating in such projects for as little as 10 minutes a day for a month saw some degree of weight reduction. They also report that for one study, volunteers reduced [caloric intake](#) by 200 calories a day on average. And another group saw reductions in the consumption of energy-

dense foods fall by 20 percent.

More information: Lindsay A. Walker et al. Cognitive and environmental interventions to encourage healthy eating: evidence-based recommendations for public health policy, *Royal Society Open Science* (2019). [DOI: 10.1098/rsos.190624](https://doi.org/10.1098/rsos.190624)

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