

Weight-loss study shows if at first you don't succeed, try, try again

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Gaining back pounds as soon as a diet is over is all too common for people attempting to lose weight (often characterized as a failure of the individual, indicative of a lack of willpower and discipline), but a new

study from scholars in York University's Faculty of Health, find such regressions are learning experiences—maybe even necessary steps toward sustained weight loss and improved overall health.

"Our results suggest repeated bouts of [weight loss](#) and regain should not be viewed as failures, but as practice," says Jennifer Kuk, a professor in York University's School of Kinesiology and Health Science and the study's lead author.

Published in the journal *Obesity's* October issue, "Association between Weight Loss History and Weight Loss Achieved in Clinical Obesity Management," summarizes a study involving 9,348 patients from the Wharton Medical Clinic, a [weight](#)-loss and diabetes clinic in Burlington, Ont.

Each participant's history of weight loss was collected through an enrolment questionnaire and their weight changes were assessed over the course of the research period. The majority of patients reported having become overweight prior to the age of 40 and having lost at least 10 pounds at least once in their lifetime.

For women, but not men, an earlier onset of overweight status and a more cumulative weight loss overall were associated with modestly greater weight loss at the clinic.

And, for both women and men, a greater frequency of past weight loss was associated with greater weight loss at the clinic.

The study also showed that achieving long-term success tends to require multiple attempts using different approaches. And at every stage, relapse and weight regain is to be expected as a necessary component of weight management and the process of optimizing health.

"This data is reassuring that previous failed attempts did not put patients at a disadvantage from being successful," says co-author Dr. Sean Wharton, York U Faculty of Health clinical adjunct professor and director of the Wharton Medical Clinic. "One should continue to make attempts at weight management, and it is likely that an appropriate approach—especially with proven effective interventions such as medication or psychological intervention—will eventually be effective."

"For any lifestyle or behavioral change, individualizing the approach—that is, practicing and refining strategies that work for that individual over time—is a key concept, and long-term weight management should be no different," adds Wharton.

More information: Jennifer L. Kuk et al, Association between weight-loss history and weight loss achieved in clinical obesity management: Retrospective chart review, *Obesity* (2022). [DOI: 10.1002/oby.23530](https://doi.org/10.1002/oby.23530)

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