The smart phone app that helps weight loss

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Researchers at the University of Liverpool have developed a smart phone app that helps users lose weight by carefully recording their food consumption.

The app was developed in response to research from the University's Institute of Psychology, Health and Society, which showed that paying attention to what you eat while you eat it helps reduce food intake and prevents consuming excess calories at future meals.

Researchers conducted a feasibility study using the app with 12 overweight and obese participants They found that over a four week period the average weight loss of the participants was 1.5kg.

The app has three key parts. In the first stage, users photograph the food or drink they are about to consume. When the user accepts the photo a short text message is sent to remind users to complete the 'Most Recent' function when they have finished their meal.

Users, after finishing the meal or drink, then select drop down answers to questions about the their food or drink consumption to find out if they finished it all and if they are full.

At the final stage users are given an interactive chronological slide show of images of everything they have consumed and photographed during that day. After viewing these users are reminded to eat attentively and to photograph their next meal.

Dr Eric Robinson who developed the app said: "Data suggested that overweight and obese participants in our four week trial used the application regularly, personalised the application based on their daily routine and were able to use the three main functions of the application."

"Raising awareness of eating and weight loss achieved suggest this approach could be fruitful. The 1.5kg average weight loss observed is similar to a recent more intensive two month trial which investigated the impact of dietary/exercise advice and habit formation. Given that our trial was a very brief intervention with little contact time and no

nutritional advice or support, this is a promising finding. A larger, randomised controlled trial testing proof of principle for an attentive eating intervention on weight loss is now warranted."

"Our study introduces a new attentive eating approach aimed at reducing dietary intake and promoting weight loss, supported by theoretical models of the role of memory on energy intake regulation. Results suggest that a simple smartphone based intervention based on these principles is feasible and could promote healthier dietary practices."

More information: The research is being presented at the European Congress on Obesity (ECO) being held in Liverpool from 12-15 of May. www.easo.org/eco2013

Provided by University of Liverpool

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