

Habit change is key to success for weight loss

28 September 2018



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Can experts in behaviour change help boost weight loss for overweight people? McGill University researchers think so: they report significant results—up to 10% of body-mass loss with this approach.

Bärbel Knäuper, Steven Grover and their team worked with nearly 200 overweight participants (both men and women) using cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) in a year-long program to achieve greater [weight loss](#) in a group setting. Their results suggest that [cognitive behavioural therapy](#) skills of the coaches (clinical psychology doctoral students) who delivered the program were a key factor in the treatment outcome—as was the regular tracking of eating and physical activity on online platforms like MyFitnessPal or myhealthcheckup.

Group-based weight [loss](#) programs normally lead to only around 3-5% weight loss. The researchers sought ways to improve the efficacy of these programs through a stronger focus on habit change.

The researchers found that:

- Behavioural weight loss programs should be administered by experts in behaviour change.
- A significant amount of weight loss was achieved in a group-based program—10% (roughly translating into 10kg per person) in 12 months on average. Most participants maintained this weight loss one year after program end.
- One group that did not benefit as much from the program are individuals who overeat in response to negative emotions (emotional eaters).

The findings, published in the journal *Obesity*, "show that a great amount of weight loss can be achieved in a group setting using CBT," says Prof. Knäuper, Health Psychology Lab in the Department of Psychology. "We are currently examining what factors contributed to the excellent weight loss results and we're continuing our investigation into how integrating CBT optimizes [weight-loss](#) as well as developing programs that are better suited for emotional eaters."

More information: Bärbel Knäuper et al. The Effects of If-Then Plans on Weight Loss: Results of the McGill CHIP Healthy Weight Program Randomized Controlled Trial, *Obesity* (2018). [DOI: 10.1002/oby.22226](https://doi.org/10.1002/oby.22226)

Provided by McGill University

APA citation: Habit change is key to success for weight loss (2018, September 28) retrieved 12 May 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-09-habit-key-success-weight-loss.html>

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