

Dating app users may be more likely to control their weight in unhealthy ways

May 30 2019



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Use of dating apps may be associated with an increased risk of unhealthy weight control behaviors, including vomiting, laxative use, or diet pill use, a study in the open access *Journal of Eating Disorders* suggests.

A team of researchers at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health examined data on 1,726 US adults enrolled in the Harvard Chan Physical Activity study who completed an [online survey](#) assessing their dating app use within the past 30 days and their engagement in six unhealthy [weight control behaviors](#) (UWBCs) within the past 12 months.

Dr. Alvin Tran, the lead author of the study said: "To our knowledge, our study is one of the first to explore dating app use in association with unhealthy weight control behaviors. When comparing those who do not use dating apps to those who do, we found that dating app users had significantly elevated odds of engaging in the six unhealthy weight control behaviors we investigated: vomiting for weight control, using laxatives for weight control, fasting for weight control, using diet pills, using muscle-building supplements, and using [anabolic steroids](#)."

The authors found that out of the 1,726 adults, 183 women and 209 men used dating apps. Compared to non-users, women who used dating apps had 2.3 to 26.9 times higher odds of engaging in UCWBs, while men who used dating apps had 3.2 to 14.6 times the odds of engaging in UWCBs.

The most common UWCBs were fasting, vomiting and laxative use. Out of those who reported using dating apps, 44.8% (82) of women and 54.1% (113) of men reported fasting, 22.4% (41) of women and 36.4% (76) of men reported vomiting, and 24% (44) of women and 41.1% (86) of men reported using laxatives for weight control. Other prevalent UWCBs included diet pill use, and use of anabolic steroids or muscle building supplements.

Dr. Tran said: "Consistent with previous research, we also found elevated rates of UWCBs in racial / ethnic minorities, particularly African Americans. We did not, however, find elevated odds of UWCBs based on [sexual orientation](#)."

The authors caution that the cross-sectional nature of the study does not allow for conclusions about cause and effect or the direction of the observed association between dating app use and UWCBs.

Dr. Tran said: "While we do not know if the people in our study were already engaging in these weight control behaviors before using dating apps, we worry that the use of these image- and appearance-focused services could exacerbate those behaviors. With the tremendous growth in dating app usage in the U.S., and an increasing number of studies linking their use to body image concerns and UWCBs, there is a need to further understand how dating apps influence health behaviors and outcomes."

More information: Dating app use and unhealthy weight control behaviors among a sample of U.S. adults: a cross-sectional study, Tran et al. *Journal of Eating Disorders* 2019. [DOI: 10.1186/s40337-019-0244-4](https://doi.org/10.1186/s40337-019-0244-4)

Provided by BioMed Central

Citation: Dating app users may be more likely to control their weight in unhealthy ways (2019, May 30) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-05-dating-app-users-weight-unhealthy.html>

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