

Study identifies top strategies for successful weight loss maintenance

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Tracking what you eat is one of the most effective behaviors reported by people who successfully maintain weight loss. Credit: WW International Inc.

Just in time for the New Year, a new Cal Poly study shows that if you want to lose weight and keep it off, building healthy dietary, self-

monitoring and psychological coping strategies may be the keys to success.

Results published today in *Obesity* found that some of the most effective behaviors and psychological strategies reported by those maintaining their [weight loss](#) included choosing [healthy food](#), tracking what you eat and using positive self-talk.

The study surveyed almost 5,000 members of WW (formerly Weight Watchers) who reported losing an average of about 50 pounds and kept it off for more than three years, to look at their [weight](#) management strategies. Researchers compared this group to a [control group](#) of more than 500 people with obesity and who reported not gaining or losing more than five pounds for a period of greater than five years.

The research team examined 54 behaviors related to weight management. Compared to the group of weight-stable individuals, the group of weight loss maintainers reported more frequent use of strategies like setting daily food intake goals, recording what was eaten each day, measuring foods, thinking about past successes, and remaining positive in the face of weight regain. The researchers also found that these eating and thinking behaviors became easier and more ingrained over time in the group of those maintaining their weight loss.

"People who maintained their successful weight loss the longest reported greater frequency and repetition in healthy eating choices," said Suzanne Phelan, a kinesiology and public health professor who led the study.

"Healthier choices also became more automatic the longer people continued to make those choices. These findings are encouraging for those working at weight loss maintenance. Over time, weight loss maintenance may become easier, requiring less intentional effort."

The nation's principal health statistics agency, estimates that nearly two

out of five (40%) adults in the U.S. have obesity and another one in three (32%) have overweight. Obesity increases the likelihood of heart disease, diabetes and some cancers, among other health conditions.

While the terms "overweight" and "obesity" are similar, the difference between the two arises with Body Mass Index, or BMI, which is a measure of body fat based on an individual's weight in relation to his or her height and age. In general, a person with a BMI of 25-29.9 is considered to have overweight, while a person with a BMI over 30 is considered to have [obesity](#).

"Successful weight loss is associated with a variety of health benefits," Phelan said. "The improved quality of life observed among the successful weight losers in this study may serve as an important motivator for people working at long-term weight management."

The results of this study can help people focus on the strategies that are most likely to help participants maintain a healthy weight

More information: Suzanne Phelan et al. Behavioral and Psychological Strategies of Long-Term Weight Loss Maintainers in a Widely Available Weight Management Program, *Obesity* (2020). [DOI: 10.1002/oby.22685](https://doi.org/10.1002/oby.22685)

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