

Virtual weight-loss support during lockdown leads to clinically meaningful weight loss

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An analysis of data from almost 2,000 UK adults who participated in a virtual weight-management support group during lockdown found that 1 in 4 (27%) lost a clinically meaningful amount of weight (5% or more of their body weight) within six weeks—which can bring substantial health benefits. The study is being presented at the European Congress on Obesity.

This amount of weight loss is associated with reduced risk for diabetes and other chronic conditions, and can bring other [health benefits](#) such as less joint pain, improved mobility, less breathlessness, better sleep, and reduced blood pressure.

Overall, participants lost an average of 7.4lbs (3.3kg) or 3.5% of their body weight in six weeks, which doctors consider a healthy amount of weight loss.

While the impact of face-to-face peer support has long been recognized as a key factor in successful weight loss, this new research suggests that even when people can't meet face-to-face, as has been

the case during COVID-19 lockdowns, receiving support virtually can still be highly effective, researchers say.

The new study was led by the UK's largest group-based weight-loss organization Slimming World. Researchers analyzed weight and attendance data for 1,935 adults (93% female; average age 43 years) who joined a Slimming World group between 12th October and 17th November 2020, after taking advantage of a 6-week discounted membership as part of Public Health England's 'Better Health' campaign. The campaign aims to encourage millions of adults to take action to improve their health, whether they want to lose weight, quit smoking or increase their activity levels.

In all, 1,733 participants attended a mixture of in-person and virtual groups due to lockdown restrictions, and 202 attended all sessions virtually. Each week the virtual sessions were delivered via video conferencing. Members received behavior change guidance to form new healthier eating habits, boost their motivation to become more active alongside the shared support of fellow members to remain motivated and focused on their weight-loss goals.

Weight data was self-reported when members attended virtual groups, and captured on electronic scales during face-to-face groups. Socioeconomic status was assessed using the Index of Multiple Deprivation (combining income, employment, health and disability, education, skills and training, barriers to housing and services, crime, and living environment, into a single score by geographical area).

The analysis found that men lost slightly more weight than women by six weeks (3.9% vs 3.5%), but the difference was not statistically significant. However, members who took part in more sessions lost more weight, highlighting the benefits of coming together with other slimmers for regular

support. Of those who attended at least five of the six weekly sessions (1,391 members), average weight loss rose to 8.3lbs (3.8kg) or 4.0% of [body weight](#) (compared to overall average 4.8 sessions and 3.5% [7.4lbs] weight loss). And 1 in 3 high attenders achieved clinically meaningful weight loss of 5% or more.

Importantly, weight change was similar across areas with different levels of deprivation, the participant's body mass index (BMI) category on joining, and age, suggesting that virtual support was accessible and effective cross different communities.

"This is an impressive amount of weight loss in just six weeks given the difficulties we've all been facing as a result of lockdown restrictions", says Dr. Sarah-Elizabeth Bennett, Slimming World's Senior Research Associate. "At a time when COVID-19 wrought havoc on the health of the UK population alongside high rates of obesity, our findings offer encouraging evidence of a virtual approach that can result in successful weight loss that is accessible to people of all ages and from all walks of life."

The authors note several limitations of the study including that it is reliant on participants to report their weight loss, which may not always be reliable, and only looked at the first six weeks of [weight](#) loss.

Provided by European Association for the Study of Obesity

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