

Weight management in university students



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Introduction

Starting university can have a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of students. The number of students becoming overweight during their first semester at university has been reported to increase by 5% whilst those becoming obese increases by 1% (Deliens *et al*, 2013). This weight gain has also been seen to continue throughout the time spent at university with overall weight gains of around 4kg (Girz *et al* 2013, Racette *et al* 2005). The aim of this study was to assess the feasibility of a commercial weight management provider supporting university students with their weight management.

Methods

To assess the feasibility of supporting students with healthy weight management, Slimming World introduced an offer of free membership to students in the UK between 30th September and 2nd November 2013. Weekly attendance, age, gender, weight and height data were collated from university students joining Slimming World during the offer period. At the point of data collection, members had been given the opportunity to attend a Slimming World group for up to 6 months.

Results

680 (3.2% male) students, mean age 21 years (4.7) joined a Slimming World group during the offer period. Mean starting weight was 86.8 kg (6.2) and BMI (n=510) was 31.4 kg/m² (6.2). During the first 12 weeks, mean attendance was 6.1 weeks (3.8), weight loss and changes in BMI increased with continuous attendance at a group (Table 1). Members still attending at the time of data extraction (n=140), achieved 6.1% (3.2) weight loss and reduced their BMI (n=107) by 1.9 kg/m² (1.0).

Table 1. Student weight and BMI changes by attendance week

Attendance (no. of weeks)	Total members	% of membership	Mean baseline weight (kg)	Baseline BMI (kg/m ²)	Mean change in BMI (kg/m ²)	Mean cumulative weight change (kg)	Mean % weight loss
Non returners (1)	79	11.6	85.78 (24.25)	31.03 (7.57)	X	X	X
2 to 5	261	38.4	84.80 (17.47)	30.70 (5.85)	-0.52 (0.47)	-1.43 (1.38)	1.69 (1.59)
6 to 10	127	18.7	88.68 (20.07)	32.13 (6.85)	-0.96 (0.82)	-2.72 (2.31)	3.07 (2.60)
11 to 15	77	11.3	87.41 (16.93)	31.97 (4.99)	-1.80 (1.12)	-4.64 (3.36)	5.30 (3.87)
16 to 20	102	15.0	88.76 (20.60)	32.14 (6.17)	-2.55 (1.41)	-6.91 (3.87)	7.80 (4.14)
21+	34	5.0	90.58 (14.88)	32.49 (5.10)	-2.82 (1.16)	-8.68 (3.55)	8.91 (3.85)

Mean (SD)

When data was categorised into BMI groups (at baseline) of healthy BMI (18.5-24.9kg/m²), overweight (25.0-29.9kg/m²) and obese (\geq 30kg/m²) similar mean weight loss was observed in the overweight and obese groups (4.98kg and 5.14kg respectively) over the first 12 weeks of attendance, with the healthy BMI group reporting lower weight loss (3.11kg).

At the point of analysis 31 members (12%) had moved from the obese to the overweight category and 39 members (21%) had achieved a healthy BMI having previously been overweight.

Conclusion

This data suggests that obtaining regular support from Slimming World can prevent weight gain common in the student population and lead to significant weight loss in those who engage well. The data also shows that individuals make lifestyle changes that help achieve a healthy BMI and in those individuals with low levels of attendance (2 to 5 attendances) the weight gain normally associated with starting university is reduced, weight remains stable or weight loss is achieved.

References

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