

# New research shows employer-based weight loss programs are helpful

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A new review of studies from the University of Cincinnati (UC) shows that a little shove from the workplace may actually be the ticket to dropping weight.

According to Michael Benedict, MD, and colleagues at UC, employer-based programs for weight loss are modestly effective at helping workers take off extra pounds.

"Worksite-based programs do tend to result in weight loss for the people that participate in them," says Benedict, co-author of the study and researcher in the department of internal medicine.

The review appears in the July-August issue of the *American Journal of Health Promotion*.

Benedict and colleagues looked at 11 studies published since 1994 to determine their results.

Most of the programs involved education and counseling designed to improve diet and increase physical activity and lasted anywhere from two to 18 months. Forty-six percent of the studies involved low-intensity interventions, 18 percent were moderate intensity and 36 percent were high intensity.

Benedict says that intensity may be an important factor when it comes to weight loss. He added that programs incorporating face-to-face contact

with subjects more than once a month appeared to be more effective than other programs.

In comparison, participants in higher intensity programs lost an average of 2.2 pounds to almost 14 pounds, while non-participants ranged from a loss of 1.5 pounds to a gain of 1.1 pounds.

"Most employed adults in the U.S. spend nearly half of their waking hours at their place of employment," Benedict says. "Worksite based programs have great potential to positively impact our current obesity epidemic.

However, Benedict says it was difficult to draw conclusions about weight-loss maintenance.

"Participants in these programs may lose weight, but it is unclear what happens after the fact, as weight maintenance has not been studied," he says.

There is also minimal data to show how much money employers could save if they start worksite weight-loss programs. Benedict says many employers want to know that implementing these programs will lead to a positive return on investment.

Studies have shown that other worksite health interventions targeting high risk employees, like smokers and people with hypertension, may benefit employers financially within only a few years.

"These programs have the potential to have a tremendous public health impact," he says. "However, more high quality research is needed."

Source: University of Cincinnati

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