

Social Support, Weight Control Strategies, and Weight Loss

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Background: Social support can lead to improved weight loss outcomes; however, the mechanism is unknown. We investigated whether social support indirectly affected weight loss through increased use of behavioral skills. Methods: Sixty-two adults with overweight/obesity (84% Female, 89% non-Hispanic White, mean age=52.6 years, BMI = 33.0 kg/m²) who took part in a randomized controlled pilot trial examining the impact of self-monitoring technology and phone-based intervention on weight loss completed the self-report Social Support for Diet/Exercise (SS) questionnaire at Month 3 (mid-intervention) and the self-report Weight Control Strategies Scale (WCSS) at Month 6 (post-test). Weight was measured at baseline and Month 6. The association between SS at Month 3, WCSS at Month 6, and percent weight change (%WC) from baseline to Month 6 was assessed using Pearson correlations. Hayes's SAS Process Macro and bootstrapping were used to analyze the indirect effect of social support on weight change, mediated by weight control strategies. Results: Higher SS scores at Month 3 predicted higher WCSS scores at Month 6, $r=0.27$ $p=.032$, and higher WCSS scores were associated with larger %WC from baseline to Month 6, $r=-0.494$ $p<.0001$. While there was not a direct effect of SS on %WC, there was a significant but small indirect effect of SS on %WC as mediated by WCSS, $b=-0.07$ 95% CI=-0.15, -0.01. Conclusion: Results suggest that social support may be beneficial to weight loss through increased use of weight control strategies. Future studies should investigate whether increasing social support positively impacts behavioral strategies use and weight loss.

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