

The effect of peer support on knowledge and self-efficacy in weight management: a prospective clinical trial in a mental health setting

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Purpose: Obesity is common in people with mental illness. Strategies to promote lifestyle modification may include education, peer support, and frequent follow up. This study evaluated the effect of group peer support on weight, Confidence and Conviction (C&C), diet quality and health-related quality of life (QOL) in a mental health setting.

Methods: Fourteen participants [aged 51.7 +/- 12.2 years; 10 females] who were unable to achieve and maintain 5% weight loss were recruited from a metabolic clinic at a mental health care facility. Inclusion and exclusion criteria are specified in the protocol. Weight, C&C, Dietary Screener Questionnaire (DSQ), and the Short Form Survey Instrument (SF-36) were collected at baseline, 3, 6, and 12 months. Clients attended a 12-month program that included education, action planning, and peer support.

Results: While confidence was below the cut-off that predicts successful behaviour change at baseline, scores trended up throughout. Weight did not change significantly. Sixty percent of scores were outside of normative ranges for health related QOL at baseline. DSQ showed mean daily sugar intakes trended down throughout. High conviction score and low sugar intake were associated with each other.

Conclusions: Increased confidence did not result in weight loss. Changes in confidence began to show an association with sugar intake at six and 12 months, suggesting that the intervention takes about six months to increase confidence adequately to result in a reduction in sugar intake.

Significance to Dietetics: Group peer support for mental health clients with metabolic conditions may produce minor improvements in sugar intake and transient changes to health-related quality of life but is not superior to traditional weight management counselling provided to clients one-on-one. However, group peer support was also not an inferior intervention and could be considered to increase the number of clients served in healthcare settings with limited RD time.

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