

Investigation of weight-loss expectations and weight control in obesity

A. McConnon, M. Raats and R. Shepherd

*Food, Consumer Behaviour and Health Research Centre, Department of Psychology, University of Surrey,
Guildford GU2 7XH, Surrey, UK*

The aim of the present abstract is to report on obese individuals' weight-loss goals and factors influencing these goals. Current guidelines recommend a target weight loss of 5–10% of original weight for successful weight control⁽¹⁾. However, research has shown that this level is a great underestimation of what obese individuals consider as successful or acceptable weight loss⁽²⁾. Unmet goals or expectations in weight control can lead to negative behaviours and psychological profiles, and ultimately abandonment of weight-control efforts.

Data reported here were collected as part of the EU 6th Framework project DiOGenes, a dietary intervention trial investigating the effectiveness of high- and low-GI and -protein diets on weight maintenance, following a rapid weight-loss period, in an obese cohort. Participants were asked to indicate their target weight in kilograms in a questionnaire completed at the screening phase. A target weight-loss score was then calculated by subtracting self-reported target weight from baseline weight.

Target weight-loss scores ranged from +11 kg to –88.6 kg and were highly correlated with baseline weight ($r = -0.73$, $P < 0.001$), weight loss during the rapid weight-loss period ($r = 0.40$, $P < 0.001$) and during the weight-maintenance phase of the study ($r = 0.15$, $P = 0.001$). On average these target weights corresponded to a 25% weight loss or a mean weight loss of 25 kg, with only 3% of the sample setting a target weight loss of $\leq 10\%$. Weight loss necessary to reach the target weight was largely in excess of actual weight change during the rapid weight-loss period (-11 kg *v.* -25 kg; $P < 0.001$) and overall weight change accounting for initial weight loss (0.05 kg *v.* -25 kg; $P < 0.001$). Differences in target weight-loss scores for gender and age were shown to be significant. Women had a significantly higher score than men ($P < 0.01$) and age was shown to be highly correlated ($r = 0.11$, $P = 0.01$) with target weight-loss score. Regression analysis investigated the influence of gender, age, baseline weight, weight at age 20 years and weight at age 30 years on target weight-loss score. All variables were shown to significantly predict target weight-loss score, with the model explaining 72% variance ($P < 0.001$).

Target weight-loss scores were significantly negatively associated with baseline weight and positively associated with weight change, indicating that individuals with greater weight loss had higher target weight-loss scores. Women and older participants had higher weight-loss expectations and target weight-loss scores were significantly predicted by previous weight history and baseline weight. Overall, this analysis reveals high weight-loss expectations in this cohort and after the intervention period target weight-loss scores were not achieved. Encouraging acceptance of realistic target weight losses in obesity management may lead to more successful treatment of obesity.

1. National Institute for Health & Clinical Excellence (2006). Obesity: the prevention, identification, assessment and management of overweight and obesity in adults and children. NICE clinical guideline 43.
2. Elfhag K & Rossner S (2005) *Obesity Rev* 6, 67–85.