



Lay summary: Difficulty managing emotions can make keeping weight off difficult

Reference: Sainsbury, K. et al. (2018). Attribution of weight regain to emotional reasons amongst European adults with overweight and obesity who regained weight following a weight loss attempt. *Eating and Weight Disorders*. DOI: 10.1007/s40519-018-0487-0.

Why is this study important? While weight loss isn't easy, lots of programmes are available to help people achieve their weight loss goals. Keeping weight off after successful weight loss is more challenging and less support is available. Difficulties managing emotions are common, often expressing as emotional eating, which may explain why keeping weight off is harder for some people.

Aims: In this study, we were interested in finding out whether people who agreed that their weight regain (after their recent weight loss) was due to emotional reasons had regained more weight than people without these difficulties, and to look at characteristics that people with emotional difficulties had in common.

What did we do? 2000 adults from the UK, Portugal, and Denmark who had previously lost weight, and then put some back on, completed an online survey. They told us how many times they'd tried to lose weight in the past, and about their most recent attempt to lose weight, including how much they weighed before they started, how much they lost, and how much they regained after stopping, what they did to lose weight and keep it off, whether they often felt out of control when eating, if they often binge ate, and how successful they felt at keeping weight off. We also asked whether they felt that they put weight back on because of any emotional reasons: feeling more stressed, low/down, or mentally exhausted than usual, feeling frustrated that they couldn't lose more weight, comfort eating, and punishing themselves using food when feeling negative.

What did we find? The results showed that people who had emotional difficulties did regain more weight after losing it than people without these difficulties. The most common emotional difficulties were feeling more stressed than usual and comfort eating when feeling negative. People with emotional difficulties were more likely to be female and younger, had experienced loss of control and binge eating, had tried to lose weight many times before, and felt less successful at keeping weight off. When trying to lose weight they had used more dietary and behavioural strategies than people without emotional difficulties, although when trying to keep weight off, they used fewer strategies.

What does it mean? Support to help people keep weight off after losing it is needed and should include teaching ways to manage emotions so that emotional difficulties do not get in the way of continuing to use dietary and behavioural strategies that are helpful in avoiding regain.