



Lay summary: Strategies for food intake support weight loss maintenance

Reference: Pedersen, S. et al. (2018). The complexity of self-regulating food intake in weight loss maintenance. A qualitative study among short- and long-term weight loss maintainers. *Social Science and Medicine*, **208**, 18-24. DOI: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2018.05.016.

Why is this study important? Maintaining weight loss over time is difficult. Different activities related to food intake can challenge weight loss maintenance, such as planning, shopping, storing and cooking food, and dealing with impulses, cues, and social norms in relation to eating. By studying how people who successfully maintain weight loss manage their food intake, we can learn more about the challenges people face in weight loss maintenance.

Aims: In this study, we were interested in finding out what strategies people, who maintain their weight loss, use to regulate their food intake. By identifying food intake strategies of both short-term maintainers (maintaining less than 12 months) and long-term maintainers (maintaining more than 12 months), we could then compare their strategies and see how they differed.

What did we do? We interviewed 18 Danish weight loss maintainers, all of whom had a BMI of at least 25 before weight loss, and who had lost at least 10 % of their body weight without regaining. Nine of these participants had kept weight off for more than 12 months (long-term maintainers), while nine had kept weight off for at least two months, but less than 12 months (short-term maintainers). Participants told us about the strategies they used for food intake while maintaining their weight loss: how they planned their food intake, how they shopped, stored and prepared food, and how they dealt with impulses, cues and social norms in different situations.

What did we find? The results showed that short- and long-term weight loss maintainers had different strategies to regulate their food intake while maintaining their weight loss. Long-term maintainers had formed routines that allowed them to be more flexible, but also provided them with stronger self-control when buying and storing food and eating at social gatherings. The short-term maintainers often displayed a 'weight loss mind-set', had less flexibility, planned more and focused on avoiding certain behaviours. Overlap between the two groups was found in terms of eating, dealing with barriers, and utilising resources to help with weight loss maintenance.

What does it mean? People who have lost weight need support to keep the weight off. Support should include ways to self-regulate activities related to food intake and dealing with impulses and cues. Helping people to understand that food intake is more than merely eating, people might be better able to find strategies or combinations of strategies that help them as individuals to maintain their weight loss.