

HO 15.2 Weight-Control Programs: The Who, What, Where, and Why

While the HEED program is likely to improve your dietary habits, possibly resulting in weight loss, it is not intended to be a weight-management program. However, several programs focus on weight management. Learning more about these programs will help you select or design something that will work for you.

There are three main types of weight-management programs: do-it-yourself, nonclinical, and clinical options.

Do-It-Yourself Programs

This type of program is one in which the participant attempts to lose weight on his or her own with few resources other than a diet book or diet product and maybe some type of group support. Many people view these programs as diets rather than weight-management programs because they often focus on what to eat rather than how to eat and maintain changes for a lifetime.

Examples

- Someone reading a book on the Paleo diet and following a high-fat, no-grain and no-dairy diet
- A worksite wellness program that emphasizes eating according to the government's health guidelines

Pros

May be just enough motivation for some people to improve their eating habits. Can be helpful for people who do not have the time or money to spend on programs that require participation in classes or sessions or purchase of specific foods and supplements.

Cons

Not all diet books are reliable sources of information. Additionally, these programs do not usually teach behavioral skills that help people make lasting changes. Therefore, people often lose some weight but gain it back over time because they are not able to follow the diet or program for the long term. Finally, people do not receive individual counseling and, therefore, rely on their own judgment when making choices and changes to their habits.

Nonclinical Programs

Commercial and privately owned weight-loss programs that typically provide participants with books or guides created by health care providers. Counselors (who may or may not be health care providers) usually provide the services to the participants.

Examples

- Weight Watchers
- Jenny Craig
- Nutri-System

HO 15.2 Weight-Control Programs: The Who, What, Where, and Why

Pros

Individual and group counseling is usually provided. Often the program incorporates more than just a diet plan; it also focuses on improving behavior skills and increasing physical activity.

Cons

Frequently these programs involve fees for participation and may require participants to use the program's foods or supplements.

Clinical Programs

Programs that are conducted in a health care setting (hospital or clinic) by licensed health care providers. Physicians, nurses, dietitians, and psychologists may work together or independently in administering the program to participants.

Examples

- A local hospital's weight loss center
- A health insurer's weight management initiative

Pros

Often these programs provide a variety of scientifically sound services including nutrition education, medical care, behavior change therapy, and physical activity recommendations. If physicians oversee the program, additional weight-loss methods may be available to participants such as supervised very low-calorie diets (typically involving formula meal replacements), prescribed weight-loss drugs, and gastric bypass (bariatric) surgery. This type of program is especially recommended for people who are severely overweight or who have additional medical problems.

Cons

In countries without publicly funded health care, these programs can be costly depending on the modes of intervention (group sessions, individual counseling, drug treatment, or surgery).