

Family Support in Nutrition and Weight Management

Social support of family members may be a useful strategy for sustained behavioral changes in nutrition and weight management. Such programs incorporate the family in the treatment process which often centers on decreasing excess caloric intake, increasing physical activity and improving diet quality. In addition, these programs include training in behavior change methods such as self-monitoring and goal-setting (1). A recent review indicated that family social support in a weight loss programs was more effective than control conditions (2). Aspects of family social support including the warmth of family interactions, emotional bonding between family members (3), and overall family satisfaction have been associated with improved health behaviors (4). Studies on family warmth measuring connectedness, caring, and nurturing have demonstrated positive associations with adolescent health behaviors including lower levels of caloric intake (5), greater frequency of eating breakfast (6), and higher intake of fruits and vegetables (6,7). Positive family social support also improved self-esteem and body satisfaction (8), while reducing negative weight control behaviors such as skipping meals. These findings suggest that family functioning variables should further be explored in the context of health behavior change programs.

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