

Getting Motivation for Healthier Lifestyle, By Phone



By Erik Lief — January 26, 2017



Tools of the exercise trade (photo courtesy: Shutterstock) [1]

Motivation to adopt a healthier lifestyle comes in many forms. And when it's offered over the phone, at a convenient time, wouldn't it seem it'd make sense to give it a try? What's to lose?

According to a recently-released study, those who had the opportunity to receive "individual wellness coaching by telephone for weight management lost an average of 10 pounds each and changed their weight trajectories from upward to downward."

The study, which included nearly 1,000 participants, has a few things going for it – as well as some limitations. But the results seem to indicate that the being encouraged to embrace healthier approaches to eating and exercise, in this manner, can pay off.

The participants were part of an initiative by the health care organization Kaiser Permanente, which sought to support its members with no-cost coaching sessions on "healthy eating, active living and weight loss strategies."

After being notified of KP's program, to avail themselves of the services the participants – 83 percent women, 52 percent white and median age 52 years old – called the company voluntarily to be part of the study. All had a "valid BMI [body mass index] observation in the year leading up to and the year after the initiating coaching session," and all sessions took place between January and late August in 2011.

In the initial session, which took between 20-30 minutes, each decided on an area to focus upon, discussed their "readiness to change" and selected specific actions to take. Follow-up sessions with wellness coaches – "master's-level clinical health educators who are trained in motivational interviewing strategies" – were typically 10–15 minutes and they were completed within a year or

less.

Researchers then compared participants' data – pertaining to weight, height, BMI and other metrics – to those of roughly 19,000 members of similar health and weight who did not participate in the coaching. And the results of the study, which was [published online](#) [2] in the journal *Obesity*, were encouraging.

Some participants lost only a few pounds, but “even a small amount of weight loss can help patients experience significant health benefits over time,” stated KP research scientist Julie A. Schmittdiel, and the study’s lead author, in a [written statement](#) [3]. “And because obesity and diabetes are major health issues in the United States, behavioral interventions within clinical settings may be an important means for addressing healthy behaviors.”

The study, which was funded by the CDC and the National Institute for Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, had some limitations. The participants were geographically limited to Northern California, where KP's Division of Research is based. In addition, as stated in the study, titled "The impact of telephonic wellness coaching on weight loss: A “Natural Experiments for Translation in Diabetes (NEXT-D)” study," the participants were required to take the initiative in order to be included in the program, and "there may be differences in motivation between patients who selected wellness coaching versus the matched control group."

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