

Weight-loss therapy: A family affair

By ACSH Staff — November 11, 2011

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), a psychotherapeutic approach used to modify problematic behaviors, is recognized as a viable means of encouraging weight loss in obese and overweight patients. Now, a study by Italian researchers has [found](#) ^[1] that the positive behavioral changes in these patients can even extend to their family members.

The study, published in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, evaluated 149 CBT patients and their family members over the course of a year. A self-administered questionnaire at baseline and shortly after the completion of the patient's program asked the 230 family members about food choices, caloric intake, height and weight, and motivation toward physical activity. On all counts, there was a significant correlation between the weight-loss success of the therapy patients and their family members. On average, family members reduced their daily caloric intake by about 230 calories, lost about two pounds, made positive changes to their diets, and developed a better attitude toward physical activity. By the end of the study, 14 family members had gone from being overweight to normal weight, and seven had dropped from obese to overweight.

While a family member's success was not typically as pronounced as that of the behavioral therapy patient, the researchers were still able to conclude that cognitive behavioral therapy positively influenced the lifestyles of patients' family members. The authors speculate that the family's involvement in their overweight or obese relative's efforts may have compelled the entire household to become more aware of their own habits and be willing to change them. ACSH's Dr. Ruth Kava thinks the results make sense, based on existing studies of the importance of a supportive community in weight loss programs. The impact of social connections is important, she says. The founder of Weight Watchers knew this.

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