

# Women's Perceived Support Compared with Weight Loss Behavior Changes

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## Introduction

The purpose of this study was to compare women's perceptions in the San Francisco Bay Area regarding social support for weight loss behavior changes. Current United States obesity prevalence remains high (34.9%) for all adults, with females of all ethnicities at higher risk (36%)<sup>1</sup>. Females also tend to seek weight loss support more frequently<sup>2</sup>. Four focus groups were conducted at San Francisco State University during the summer of 2014 to identify themes related to weight loss and perceived support with women (n=15) who had lost or wanted to lose weight. In addition to the focus group qualitative data, each participant completed a survey which included 28 validated questions<sup>3</sup>, demographic information and self-reported height and weight.

## Hypothesis

Bay Area women who are currently making **behavior changes** toward weight loss perceive greater **social support** than women who are not making behavior changes toward weight loss.

### Behavior Changes



### Social Support



### Long-Term Weight Loss Maintenance

## Methods

### Questionnaire

Current weight  
Goal weight  
Age and ethnicity

### Behavior categories

- Limiting behaviors
- Eating behaviors
- Activity behaviors
- Exercise behaviors

### Focus Group

#### Discussion questions

- General support
- Social support
- Perceived support
- Desired support
- Health impact from perceived support

## Results

### Most Common Perceived Support: Individual



### Most Common Desired Support: Friends



## Participant Quotes

**Perceived Support:** "I found that where I feel the most supported is myself...it comes from within. You have to be your...own hero." (Age 36, Current BMI 19.5)

**Desired Support:** "If I had more friends or if I met more people...to do the gym or weight loss, I think that it would make me a lot better." (Age 53, Current BMI 33.7)

## Focus Group Themes\*

### Perceived Support

- Individual (18)
- Family (12)
- Online (12)
- Friends (6)
- Healthcare Provider/RD (5)
- Gym (2)
- Work (2)

### Desired Support

- Friends (12)
- Work (10)
- Group (8)
- Individual (7)
- Trainer/Coach (6)
- Family (5)
- Corporate (4)
- Community (2)

## Conclusions

*Individual* support was the predominant theme for perceived support, while *family* and *online* support were also key aspects of each discussion.

Interestingly, **Perceived Support** from *friends* did not come up as often, but was the most mentioned theme when it came to **Desired Support**.

Understanding how women seek, find, and perceive support in their endeavors to lose weight is important for registered dietitians to recognize and provide effective individual guidance.

## References

<sup>1</sup> Ogden, C. L., Carroll, M. D., Kit, B. K., & Flegal, K. M. (2014). Prevalence of childhood and adult obesity in the United States, 2011-2012. *JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association*, 311(8), 806-814. doi:10.1001/jama.2014.732

<sup>2</sup> Bennett, N. (September 19, 2014). Personal communication.

<sup>3</sup> Villacorta, M. (February 13, 2015). Personal communication.

<sup>3</sup> Foley, S. (2009). *Psychometric properties of a measure designed to assess stage of change for eating behaviors* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. Publication Number 3364599.

\* Focus Group Themes: numbers in parentheses represent number of times theme was mentioned in focus group discussion.

