

## Behaviors Reported as Helpful among Participants of the LIFESTEPS® Weight Management Program

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### ABSTRACT

**BACKGROUND:** Obesity is a serious public health problem, associated with many co-morbidities. Because different approaches are utilized in weight management programs, behaviors most helpful for success need to be clearly identified.

**METHODS:** 1592 participants enrolled in the LIFESTEPS® Weight Management Program (10-16 weekly meetings, combining nutrition, physical activity, and behavior change principles) between 2003 and 2009. Of the original sample size, 733 (83.9% female, 16.1% male; age  $54.5 \pm 11.3$  y) completed a survey at program exit reporting behaviors most helpful for success. Paired-sample t-tests determined the impact of the program on adiposity. Participants were divided into three groups based upon percent weight lost (low =  $\leq 4.9\%$ , medium =  $5.0-9.9\%$ , high =  $\geq 10.0\%$ ). A two-way contingency table evaluated the proportion of individuals selecting behaviors as helpful for the weight groups. Follow-up pairwise comparisons evaluated the difference among these proportions. Data analyzed using SPSS and significance was determined if  $P < 0.05$ .

**RESULTS:** Body weight (initial  $97.3 \pm 22.0$  kg; final  $92.7 \pm 21.4$  kg;  $p < 0.001$ ) and body mass index (initial  $35.4 \pm 7.3$  kg/m<sup>2</sup>; final  $33.7 \pm 7.1$  kg/m<sup>2</sup>;  $p < 0.001$ ) decreased significantly after completing the program. When asked to select behaviors most helpful for weight management, 63.6% reported “keep food records,” 40.8% reported “measure serving sizes,” 40.0% reported “record calories,” and 39.4% reported “do aerobic exercise.” Behaviors most helpful for success differed between the three weight groups. A greater proportion of the high group reported “do aerobic exercise” compared to the low and medium groups. Greater proportions of the low and high group cited “do strength training” compared to the medium group. A greater proportion of the medium group cited “record calories” compared to the low group.

**CONCLUSION:** Participants reported that “keep food records,” “measure serving sizes,” “record calories,” and “do aerobic exercise” were the most helpful behavior changes. Future studies should continue to identify behavior changes essential for weight management.