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Psychologists cite emotions as top obstacle to weight loss

Consumer Reports publishes results from recent survey of APA members

By Public Relations staff

Jan. 31, 2013—When it comes to losing weight, people often focus on eating less and exercising more. But results of a survey of psychologists suggest dieters should pay attention to the role emotions play in weight gain and loss if they hope to succeed.

The survey, conducted by the Consumer Reports National Research Center, asked more than 1,300 licensed psychologists how they dealt with clients' weight and weight loss challenges. When asked which strategies were essential to losing weight and keeping it off, psychologists cited "understanding and managing the behaviors and emotions related to weight management" as essential for addressing weight loss with their clients (44 percent). Survey respondents also cited "emotional eating" (43 percent) as a barrier to weight loss, and included "maintaining a regular exercise schedule" (43 percent) and "making proper food choices in general" (28 percent) as keys to shedding pounds. In general, gaining self-control over behaviors and emotions related to eating were both key, indicating that the two go together.

"These survey findings underscore how psychologists can help people with weight management," says APA Executive Director for Professional Practice Katherine C. Nordal, PhD. "The same skills and strategies we use with patients to address other issues such as problem-solving, self-discipline, motivation and emotion regulation can be applied to weight loss goals."



Ninety-two percent of the 306 respondents who provide weight loss treatment reported helping a client "address underlying emotional issues related to weight gain." More than 70 percent identified cognitive therapy, problem-solving and mindfulness as "excellent" or "good" weight loss strategies. In addition, motivational strategies, keeping behavioral records and goal-setting were also important in helping clients lose weight and keep it off, according to survey results. The survey results are reported in the February 2013 issue of *Consumer Reports Magazine*[®] and online at Consumer Reports (<http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/magazine/2013/02/lose-weight-your-way/index.htm>).

Consumer Reports surveyed 1,328 licensed psychologists who provide direct patient care in September 2012 about their work and professional opinions regarding weight loss. The online poll was designed by the Consumer Reports National Research Center in partnership with experts provided by the American Psychological Association.

Survey participants were randomly selected from the American Psychological Association's membership file. The margin of error was +/- 3 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level. A total of 55 percent of the sample was female, and the median age was 59 years old.

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