

Parallel Session RTD Line 4 / Psychological Predictors of weight loss

Lecture 4: Obese people's perceptions of obesity and weight loss

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Abstract

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Understanding individuals' beliefs and perceptions of illness is thought to be central to successful treatment. Therefore obese people's beliefs regarding obesity and the influence of these beliefs on weight control during the DiOGenes dietary intervention trial were investigated.

Participants of the DiOGenes RTD1 dietary intervention trial were asked about their beliefs regarding the causes, consequences and possible treatment options for obesity at three time points during the study (baseline, after LCD and at the end of the weight maintenance phase). Participants rated a series of statements, on five point Likert scales relating to the causes, consequences and potential treatments for their overweight status. The relationship between these beliefs, baseline weight status and weight control during the intervention were investigated.

Participants rated behavioural factors (mean=4.1) highest as a cause for their overweight, compared with medical (2.9), psychological (2.8) and social factors (1.7). Mean scores for medical (3.2), psychological (3.1) and social consequences (3.1) were all rated relatively equally. Results for beliefs about the helpfulness of different treatment options revealed that participants believed behavioural treatments to be the most likely to be effective.

Baseline weight was shown to be significantly correlated to the belief that medical ($r=0.07$, $p=0.04$) and behavioural factors ($r=0.1$, $p<0.001$) had a causal role in participants' overweight and with the belief that their overweight had negative medical consequences such as heart disease, painful joints and diabetes ($r=0.2$, $p<0.001$) and social consequences such as low income and difficulty making friends ($r=0.2$, $p<0.001$). Analysis looking at weight maintenance and beliefs about obesity showed significant correlations between weight maintenance and beliefs about medical causes ($r=-0.12$, $p=0.006$) and social causes ($r=-0.11$, $p=0.009$). In terms of treatment options, weight maintenance was shown to be significantly correlated with the belief that visiting a dietitian would help in weight loss efforts ($r=-0.2$, $p<0.001$).

This analysis suggests that obese people seeking treatment for their weight believe behavioural factors to be important contributors to their overweight status. However, beliefs about obesity were only shown to be weakly correlated with baseline weight and subsequent weight control in the DiOGenes cohort.