

The relationship of website utilization to weight loss success in an online behavioral obesity treatment program

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Purpose: On-line behavioral obesity treatment programs can produce clinically significant weight losses, although response varies substantially. Utilization of web components may help explain treatment success. The purpose of this study was to evaluate differences in website utilization patterns for participants who were successful and unsuccessful in a 6-month online behavioral weight control intervention.

Methods: Participants in a 6-month online weight loss program (n=159) were divided into weight loss tertiles. Web features evaluated included logins, self-monitoring journal usage and chat group attendance. Web usage by tertile was examined over the first 6 weeks, last six weeks and entire 6 months of treatment using ANOVA and multivariate repeated measures.

Results/Findings: Average weight loss during the intervention was 0.2%, 5.5% and 11.7% of baseline weight for Low, Medium and High tertiles, respectively. Internet usage for logins, journal and chat was significantly greater in High than either Low or Medium ($p < 0.001$) over six months. Low and Medium were not different from each other. Usage of all web components decreased over time with no difference in this pattern between tertiles in the first vs. last 6 weeks.

Conclusions: Individuals in the highest weight loss tertile were more engaged with web treatment components. Those in the lower two tertiles of weight loss were using web components less frequently early in the intervention suggesting that the first 6 weeks of treatment can predict outcomes.