

Worksite Wellness: A Focus on Lifestyle Changes

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The objective of this American Heart Association funded study was to determine the impact of an onsite worksite wellness program utilizing two treatment arms, in-person or distance learning platform on diet, body composition, physical activity and cardiovascular disease risk outcomes. The prospective 12-week two-arm intervention study conducted by the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey's Institute for Nutrition Interventions utilized a convenience sample of 137 overweight or obese University employees; 69 participated in-person and 68 participated via Internet. Participants met with the Registered Dietitian (RD) at baseline to establish individual diet and physical activity goals utilizing the American Heart Association Diet Guidelines and the Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005 as a basis for setting goals. Parameters measured at baseline and week 12 included weight, waist and hip circumference, body fat percentage and physical activity utilizing the International Physical Activity Questionnaire (IPAQ). Framingham scores and body mass index (BMI) were calculated. All participants weighed in weekly.

Twelve 50-minute weekly education sessions focused on diet and snacking, exercise and reducing chronic disease risk were provided live to the in-person group and via distance-learning to the Internet group. Specific session topics included a focus on portion control, a virtual supermarket tour, tips on eating out healthfully and avoiding stress eating during the holidays. Participants were given pedometers, and exercise bands along with indoor walking paths and guidelines to improve activity throughout the workday. Group discussions were prompted by the RD at the conclusion of each in-person education session. Internet group interaction was initiated by the RD posting questions on the virtual discussion board where participants could respond to the RD privately or to the entire group. Goals were individually reviewed at weeks 6 and 12. SPSSv15.0 was used for data analysis, alpha was set at $p=0.05$; split ANOVA and interquartile ranges were used.

The overall retention rate was 82.5% ($n=113$) for the 12-week intervention. Participants were primarily women (93.4%, $n=128$), 23-65 years old (mean=46.5 years, $SD=10.5$) and of mixed cultural backgrounds. At week-12, there were significant decreases within participants for weight ($F=58.10$, $p<0.0001$), body fat ($F=21.57$, $p<0.0001$), BMI ($F=49.71$, $p<0.0001$), waist circumference ($F=122.30$, $p<0.0001$) and Framingham Scores for men ($F=6.80$, $p=0.05$) and women ($F=4.23$, $p=0.04$). There were no significant differences between arms for demographic characteristics, body composition changes or Framingham Scores. In-person participants' median IPAQ scores (MET-minutes/week) increased 75% from 1356.00 to 2373.00; interquartile range increased from 2400 to 2979. Internet participants' median scores (MET-minutes/week) increased 16% from 1039.00 to 1200; interquartile range increased from 1962.00 to 2289.00.

The results provide evidence of the positive impact of a 12-week worksite wellness program on health outcomes, regardless of the learning platform.