Delivering an effective, evidence-based approach to healthy weight management

Information for health professionals

Slimming with support
Slimming World combines a satisfying, sustainable healthy eating plan, a programme to help members gradually increase their physical activity levels, and facilitation of behaviour change through our unique group support system.

Focus on life-long lifestyle change and the prevention of future weight gain

Slimming World’s focus is on supporting people to adopt healthy habits around eating and physical activity for the long term. Our weekly groups ensure members feel empowered and equipped with the necessary skills to develop lasting self-determined behaviour change. Members attend free of charge when they reach their personally selected target weight to support maintenance of weight loss.

Developed by a multidisciplinary team

Over 45 years our programme has been continually reviewed and developed in line with latest thinking on nutrition, exercise and the psychology of behaviour change. We have an in-house team of registered dietitians and nutritionists, while a specialist advisor panel brings together experts in diet, exercise and the psychology of behaviour change. Members attend free of charge when they reach their personally selected target weight to support maintenance of weight loss.

Staff are trained and receive regular professional development

A dedicated training team delivers specialist training in facilitating behaviour change for weight control via Slimming World’s bespoke Academy, as well as an initial foundation training package, regular on-going training, personal development and support is provided for all Consultants who run our groups, with a strong focus on a deep understanding of the emotional and psychological aspects of being overweight. A robust management structure helps ensure consistency among our groups with a firm emphasis on quality of service provision.

NICE and SIGN obesity guidance: How Slimming World meets the standard

Slimming World supports both the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN) obesity guidance and the opportunity that they offer health professionals to work with commercial weight management organisations.

Both sets of guidance recognise the importance of providing regular and ongoing support for behaviour change – not only for losing weight but for maintaining weight. Slimming World pioneered referral from primary care to commercial weight management services and is able to demonstrate how it meets the guidance criteria.

A multi-component programme

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Last at least 3 months, offer at least fortnightly sessions including a ‘weigh-in’

Our groups are open 52 weeks of the year and members attend for as long as they wish. Groups include a confidential weigh-in followed by a support session to facilitate learning and behaviour change. Members continue to be supported in between groups by a series of ‘lifelines’ including personal support from the Consultant and other group members and free online support from the member website.

Ensure achievable goals for weight loss are agreed for different stages

At Slimming World, every achievement is recognised and praised, not just weight loss but new thinking and new decisions. Our award system helps members stay motivated throughout their journey, breaking down overall goals into mini targets and rewarding gradual changes in behaviour. All members set their own target weight and interim targets and there is never any pressure to reach an ‘ideal’ weight.

Ensure specific dietary targets are agreed, tailored to individual needs

Slimming World’s healthy eating plan encourages members to eat plenty of highly satisfying, low energy dense foods while controlling intake of high energy dense foods. It empowers members to make healthier food choices, satisfy their appetites and lose weight – without the need for calorie counting or obsessive weighing or measuring. No foods are banned, but energy dense, high fat and sugary foods are limited to support weight loss. Members are supported in tailoring the plan to individual tastes, requirements and to achieve personally determined dietary changes.

Discuss how to reduce sedentary behaviour and incorporate activity into everyday life

Our activity support programme is based on the understanding of the barriers overweight people may face in becoming more active. Members are supported in taking those first steps to becoming more active, and build up in small, steady increments, with the ultimate goal of building up to the recommended 150 minutes’ moderate intensity activity a week. Practical advice and sharing of ideas helps members reduce sedentary behaviour and make activity an intrinsic part of their day.

Use a variety of behaviour change methods

Our support system combines individual one-to-one participation in a carefully structured forum. Through a process closely resembling motivational interviewing, Slimming World Consultants begin to understand members’ individual motivators and goals. With gentle guidance members embark on a process of guided self-discovery – they become aware of their individual obstacles to healthy eating and activity and identify their own (often self-defeating) patterns of behaviour, and through carefully facilitated discussion within the group they are helped to develop new, personal strategies to overcome them.

Tailer programmes to support the needs of different groups

Our groups are held within the heart of local communities, at a variety of times and different days of the week so they’re as accessible as possible for the local community. Our flexible non-prescriptive approach allows us to support the needs of different population groups. Our programme has been demonstrated to be equally effective for men, those with particular medical conditions and with higher starting BMIs for example. We also provide tailored support and advice for groups including pregnant or breast-feeding women, teenage members and those with food intolerances.

Adopt a respectful, non-judgemental approach

Genuine compassion and care is fundamental to our approach. Our support is based on the belief that the burden carried by overweight people is two-fold. There is the burden of excess weight itself, but there is also a far heavier burden to be lifted - that of guilt, shame, self-criticism and poor self-esteem. For many overweight people, successful long term weight loss can only be achieved by tackling these deeper emotional issues and this support is only effective when it is delivered with genuine warmth, compassion, empathy, respect and understanding.

Founded in 1969, Slimming World is the UK’s most advanced and effective weight management organisation. With over 16,000 weekly groups held across the UK, we influence 3 million people each year to eat more healthily and adopt a more active lifestyle.

Slimming World’s philosophy is based on a deep understanding of how people with a weight problem feel, coupled with a passionate desire to help them achieve their goals. Over 46 years it has been developed and refined in line with the latest thinking on nutrition, exercise and the psychology of behaviour change. Our service is available to adults and we have a special programme for young people aged 11-15.

Slimming World groups are run by a network of 4,500 Slimming World Consultants, all recruited from successful group members and working in their local community. Consultants receive specific training in dietary aspects of weight management, the role of physical activity and, importantly, effective facilitation of behaviour change. There is a strong management support structure with an emphasis on quality and consistency of service provision.

Our multi-component approach

Slimming World integrates three key principles to help people adopt a healthier lifestyle:

- A warm, empowering group environment which supports members and facilitates behaviour change around eating and activity habits.
- A satisfying eating plan to promote healthy eating patterns for life.
- An activity management programme to help members gradually increase physical activity levels.

Our programme is a lifestyle programme; not just a theory – it’s an activity. We create an environment that makes it easier for people to make healthy choices and changes, and then support them to make those changes. Unconditional caring support is the key.

James and Joyce Quinn joined Slimming World together, and lost more than 20st between them.
group support to facilitate behaviour change

Unique to Slimming World is powerful group support, skillfully designed to meet the needs of members. With the guarantee of confidentiality, compassion, empathy and empowering adult-to-adult guidance, members make step-by-step changes to their diet and activity levels.

Individual groups very much reflect the needs of their particular community. Slimming World Consultants are themselves members of the local community and facilitate group discussion and the sharing of ideas relevant to the local population, the group demographic and individual circumstances, eg financial constraints or ethnic preferences.

Offered across a range of days and at different times of day, the majority of sessions are held outside normal working hours. People working shifts are able to access different groups according to their shift pattern. Groups are usually held in easily accessible venues such as church and school halls, community centres and social clubs. This encourages a broad-based membership, including those people traditionally considered ‘hard to reach’ by health programmes. Our data shows Slimming World’s membership comes from across all socioeconomic backgrounds demonstrating that deprivation is not a major barrier to attendance.

What happens in a Slimming World group?

As soon as a member walks through the doors of any Slimming World group, they can be assured of a warm welcome from their Consultant and fellow members – a group of really friendly people all at various stages of their weight loss journey.

Before they decide whether to join, their Consultant will explain Slimming World’s programme and they’ll be invited to observe a group session – and join it if they wish. If they decide to join, they’ll be weighed and enrolled by the Consultant at the end of the group.

Our group support system combines individual attention and group participation in a carefully structured forum. Group discussions range from practical sharing of tips and ideas to a deeper understanding of each individual’s danger zones and slimming pitfalls. On a practical level, there is strong emphasis on sharing favourite recipe ideas and discussing local stores’ special offers on healthy foods. There is also a focus on basic cooking skills rather than reliance on convenience foods, and general cooking tips are shared. Our advice and literature take cost, cultural preferences, cooking ability and time constraints into consideration.

For those in need of a deeper level of support, our Consultants have a number of methods and tools to help members become aware of individual obstacles and barriers to change and through carefully facilitated discussion, develop personal strategies to overcome them (see pages 4-5). All sessions last for around 1hr 30mins, with additional support provided between groups in the form of a series of ‘lifelines’:

• Telephone, email and text support from the Consultant and other group members
• Free online support from the Slimming World member website
• Slimming World magazine and recipe books.

First-class training, first-class service

• All Slimming World Consultants have been successful group members themselves. They are carefully selected through an interview process to ensure they have the necessary skills to empathise, empower and support people in managing their weight.

• Slimming World has a dedicated training team, supported by a team of registered nutritionists and dietitians, which delivers tailored training in the dietary aspects of weight loss, facilitating behaviour change and the importance of physical activity.

• Ongoing training is provided for all Consultants. There is also a strong management structure to ensure that the quality and consistency of groups is maintained; this is monitored by regular group development visits and weekly one on one support from a manager. Measures of success include weight losses, number of members achieving their goal weight, member retention and achievement of 10% weight loss.

Our research

An audit of over 1.3 million Slimming World group members (the largest ever by a commercial weight loss organisation) found that in their first 3 months, Slimming World members, on average:

• lost 3.9kg, 4.4% of their body weight
• reduced their BMI by -1.4kg/m².

Furthermore, those members who attended at least 75% of possible sessions, on average:

• lost 6.8kg, 7.5% of their body weight
• reduced their BMI by -2.5kg/m².

The data also highlights how members joining with higher BMIs lose slightly more weight resulting in similar percent weight loss across all BMI groups, indicating that our programme is as effective for those with high BMIs as it for those who are moderately overweight.

In the longer term, data from members attending at least 75% of possible sessions in their first year, shows how these members, on average:

• lost 12.7kg, 13.2% of their body weight
• reduced their BMI by 4.7kg/m².

Slimming World groups have the expertise and experience to help in behaviour change. They are also another brick in the wall of social support that is necessary to tackle obesity in the UK.

Andy Hill,
Professor of Medical Psychology,
Leeds University School of Medicine
Individual motivation and group support

Slimming World’s unique group support system is a complex process of individual support in a powerfully motivating group setting, made simple for group members. It avoids any criticism, control or judgement and uses elements of techniques including Transactional Analysis, Motivational Interviewing, influence of ego states on behaviour and more recently Compassionate Mind Theory, to help individuals overcome their own personal barriers to change and to avoid relapse.

At Slimming World we call this positive support structure IMAGE (Individual Motivation And Group Experience) Therapy.

Based on a deep understanding of the psychology of overweight people, this support system is designed to increase the confidence and self-esteem of our members, while equipping them with tools to develop lasting self-determined behaviour change.

Our support is based on the belief that the burden carried by overweight people is two-fold. There is the burden of excess weight itself, but there is also a far heavier burden to be lifted – that of shame, self-criticism and poor self-esteem. For many overweight people, successful long-term weight loss can only be achieved by tackling these deeper emotional issues and this support is only effective when it is delivered with genuine warmth, compassion, empathy, respect and understanding.

IMAGE Therapy takes members through the phases of commitment to change: through psychological commitment and behavioural commitment and reinforces these consistently until behaviour becomes intrinsic, ie it has become important to them and they are no longer dependent on reward or praise.

Three stages of IMAGE Therapy:

Each week a member receives:

1. Appropriate praise to help them see things positively and in perspective

2. Individual attention, often with group participation, to identify problems and receive help and advice to deal positively with those problems

3. A positive conclusion with goals for the forthcoming week. Members leave group each week prepared with a plan to address potential problems, having set individual weight loss and behaviour change targets.

Beyond the group input, Consultants provide a deeper level of support as and when needed with a motivational toolkit including:

- Self-monitoring of food, feelings and emotions, including food diaries
- ‘For’ and ‘against’ evaluations
- Visualisation techniques
- Personal eating plans.

All of these address commitment to change depending on the individual member’s circumstances.

Focus on achievement

- Members’ weights are kept confidential
- Members are encouraged to set sensible and realistic goals for long term success
- Members choose their own Personal Achievement Targets for weight loss, both short term and long term, which, and if, they feel ready to do so
- Members are supported in maintaining their weight loss by the offer of free life membership when personal targets are reached
- Members are initially encouraged to focus on losing and maintaining a 10% loss of body weight, highlighting the health benefits of modest amounts of weight loss.

Kim Freshwater lost an amazing 17st 5lbs with the support of her Slimming World group in Hampshire.

Before Slimming World I wasn’t living. I was existing. I walked with the help of sticks and I had a string of health problems including high blood pressure, breathing problems, back and knee pain. All of that has changed since losing weight – I’m living life to the full. Daily life is a breeze, I’m taking part in activities with my family instead of watching from the side-lines – I’ve even completed a 10k charity run! There’s so much I want to do, and I’m enjoying every minute!
A multi-layered approach

Our support system combines individual attention and group participation in a forum where members can discuss their experiences, identify their own (often self-defeating) patterns of behaviour and, with support from their group Consultant and each other, discover new ways of overcoming barriers to change.

It’s tailored to meet the needs of individual slimmers, based on the recognition that every overweight person is different. Their psychological commitment to change has been shaped by a complex equation of individual factors including weight, body shape, lifestyle, dieting history, opinions on food, daily habits, personality, income and family background.

For some people, perhaps those who don’t have very much weight to lose, the group discussion around food and the sharing of practical advice on healthy eating may be just the support they need to switch to a healthier way of life. For those who have more deep-seated issues around food, more deeply ingrained patterns of self sabotage and low self-esteem, a deeper level of motivational support is needed and given.

Through a process most closely resembling motivational interviewing, Slimming World Consultants begin to understand each member’s individual motivators and goals. With gentle guidance members embark on a process of guided self-discovery, they become aware of their own individual obstacles to healthy eating and activity and develop personal strategies to overcome them. Public recognition and unconditional support while they work through this process reinforce their desire to change.

Consultants are trained to remain highly attentive, responding to the member’s body language, tone of voice and subtle self-criticism to ensure they set realistic goals and identify changes they can commit to.

Slimming World’s IMAGE Therapy is unique among slimming clubs. It enables the Consultant to facilitate long term behaviour changes by encouraging the slimmer to become aware of their own individual obstacles to healthy eating and activity and develop personal strategies to overcome them. Through a process closely resembling motivational interviewing, Slimming World Consultants begin to understand each member’s individual motivators and goals. With gentle guidance members embark on a process of guided self-discovery, they become aware of their own individual obstacles to healthy eating and activity and develop personal strategies to overcome them. Public recognition and unconditional support while they work through this process reinforce their desire to change.

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Slimming World’s IMAGE Therapy gives them the practical skills they need to bring healthier habits into their daily lifestyle.

- The weekly groups encourage members to buy everyday healthy foods and to cook from scratch for themselves and their family.
- Members share favourite recipes, best buys and special offers at local supermarkets.
- Members are encouraged to help others by talking about how they have avoided potential pitfalls, and share ideas for eating out and coping with special occasions.
- The group provides ideas and solutions to encourage activity, allowing members to share knowledge of local facilities, discuss personal experience of new activities or even get together and become ‘exercise buddies’.

Changes are gradual and results are steady, as psychological barriers to changes are broken down. With the ongoing support of the group, behavioural commitment to new healthier habits and routines is built, so that these changes become intrinsic.

Rewarding changes and celebrating success

Goal setting and rewarding success are vital as they give each member a focus and help them to feel good about themselves. Every achievement is recognised and praised by the group, including new thinking and new decisions, even when there is no weight loss to celebrate. Members who have not lost weight get support during IMAGE Therapy by sharing experiences with people who have gone through similar situations and by receiving praise for their continued commitment.

Slimming World’s award system helps the member to stay motivated throughout their journey by breaking down their overall goal (one that can seem enormous at the beginning of the journey) into mini targets and rewarding gradual changes in behaviour.

Practical advice for healthier lifestyles

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Real success

Julie, 50, from Yorkshire, lost her weight 20 years ago. At over 18st, she was constantly exhausted. With the support of her Slimming World group she lost weight and then maintained her new weight as a target member, also incorporating regular exercise into her lifestyle. She says:

‘The eating habits I’ve learned from Slimming World will always be a major part of my life.

Carel, 64, lost her ‘baby weight’ with Slimming World, and thanks to the new eating habits she put in place back in 1974, she’s maintained a healthy weight ever since, which has also helped her to manage a heart condition. She says:

‘Food Optimising and Body Magic aren’t just words—they’re life savers.’

Betty, 76, was a member of Slimming World when it first began in 1969. She’s worked as a Slimming World Consultant ever since and believes that the core values of the organisation haven’t changed:

‘There is the same warm, welcoming atmosphere, the same emphasis on healthy foods and the same opportunity to discuss your weight in complete privacy.’

Jacqui, 39, has battled with weight problems as well as depression and endometriosis for many years. Now thanks to a combination of healthy eating and regular exercise, she’s in control of her weight and now works as a training manager at the Slimming World Academy in Derbyshire.

Michel, 33, from Belfast, was over 23st when he joined Slimming World. He swapped takeaways, ready meals and chocolate for healthier homemade meals based on pasta, rice, lean meat and plenty of fruit and veg to lose 8st in 2008. He says:

‘I thought slimming clubs didn’t work and weren’t for men, and I was wrong!’

From left:
Julie Parker, 50, from Yorkshire, lost 8st 13lbs in 1999
Carol Sherwin, 54, from Derbyshire, lost 2st over 35 years ago
Betty Oldknew, 76, from Derbyshire, lost 2st in 1969 and has maintained her weight for 40 years
Jacqui Goodwin, 39, from Cleveland, lost 13lbs in 1999
Michel Cripps, 33, from Belfast, lost 8st in 2008

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The science behind Slimming World’s Food Optimising

Research has shown that the nature and composition of the foods we eat, dietary macronutrients and energy density, impact our sense of satisfaction and fullness (satiety). Encouraging a higher intake of more satiating foods will limit energy intake and result in weight loss. Slimming World has been actively involved in this field of research and, along with the Scottish Office, sponsored research conducted by Professor James Stubbs at the Rowett Research Institute. There is now a robust evidence base which shows that foods higher in protein and carbohydrates are far more satiating than foods rich in fat.

Research also shows that people feel full due to the amount of food they eat, not the number of calories they take in. Choosing low energy dense foods can increase the volume of food eaten, while reducing energy intake, and thus satisfy appetite.

Since its inception in 1969, Food Optimising has always successfully embraced the scientific principles of appetite regulation and energy density in a practical way to regulate energy intake, allowing members to eat unlimited amounts of highly satisfying foods, which will naturally help limit calorie intake without the chore of counting or feeling deprived.

Food Optimising is easy to follow, focusing on three main components:

1. The concept of **Free Foods** promotes consumption of plenty of low energy dense and highly satiating foods, eg poultry, fish, lean meat, pasta, grains, vegetables and fruit, which can be eaten without restriction. Members are encouraged to use these foods to satisfy their appetite while reducing overall energy intake. With Free Foods members don’t have to monitor every mouthful – so compliance is easy to establish and sustain.

2. **Healthy Extras** help provide a good overall balance of nutrients in addition to those obtained from Free Foods, with particular emphasis on calcium and fibre-rich foods, eg milk, cheese, cereals and wholemeal bread.

3. The synergy between **Free Foods, Healthy Extras** and **Syns** makes Food Optimising effective and easy to live with long term. Syns are the way members can enjoy the foods that many diets ban – without a shred of guilt! Counting Syns helps members naturally limit consumption of saturated fats, alcohol and sugar, ie those foods with a high energy density and poor ability to satisfy hunger.

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Food Optimising is Slimming World’s healthy eating plan. Based on the principles of energy density and satiety, Food Optimising empowers members to make healthier food choices, satisfy their appetites and lose weight – without calorie counting or obsessive weighing and measuring.

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**James Stubbs,**
Professor of Appetite Control and Energy Balance, University of Leeds
Slimming World’s stage-by-stage activity programme, Body Magic, complements our Food Optimising eating plan by helping members improve their overall health and wellbeing while aiding weight management.

The programme was developed in collaboration with Ken Fox, Emeritus Professor of Exercise and Health Sciences, University of Bristol. It uses well-established psychological and scientific principles of behaviour change to help slimmers find their own personal, enjoyable and sustainable ways of gradually increasing activity so that it becomes a regular part of their daily routine.

A balanced approach

Through the structure of Free Foods, Healthy Extras and Syns, Food Optimising provides a flexible and practical weight-loss plan whilst also encouraging a balanced approach in line with current healthy eating guidelines.

Food Optimising promotes a reduction in fat, particularly saturated fat, and the inclusion of at least five portions of fruit and vegetables per day alongside starchy carbohydrates and lean protein-rich foods to satisfy the appetite. Measured portions of fibre and calcium-rich foods are included on a daily basis. All major food groups are encouraged in line with the Eatwell Guide and health notes guide members in following current Government recommendations on healthy eating.

A survey of over 2,000 people following Food Optimising showed that the programme encourages significant changes towards healthier food choices in line with current guidelines:

- 78% now buy more fruit and vegetables
- 74% eat less fatty food
- 61% eat less sugary foods
- 58% eat fewer ready meals and takeaways

Over 80% of people following Food Optimising also reported improvements in their health. As part of a pan-European research programme, DiOGenes, data shows Slimming World members who have been following Food Optimising for at least six months have an average percentage energy intake from carbohydrate of 51%, 21% energy intake from protein and 25% from fat.

Supporting an active lifestyle

Realistic and flexible, Food Optimising:

- takes into account individual needs and preferences
- adapts to all lifestyles, cultures and budgets, and is suitable for all the family
- encourages slimmers to feel free and relaxed about food, eliminating the distress caused by feelings of guilt, hunger, deprivation and loss of control
- enables members to take control of their own health and lifestyle for the long term
- doesn’t ban foods or food groups
- doesn’t use expensive or specialist ‘diet’ products.


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Stage-by-stage encouragement and rewards

Body Magic allows members to build their activity levels at their own pace and rewards the incremental introduction of daily exercise.

First aim to do a bit more than you usually do – even if it’s only 5 or 10 minutes a day –

Increase your activity levels in small, steady steps you can build on over time

Fit some activity into most days of the week, make it part of your daily routine

10 minutes a day, every day, for 5 days of the week is much better than doing it all on one day

Then make it a habit

When you’re comfortable with this and it’s fitting in with your daily routine, gradually increase the amount you do each day

Build up in blocks of 15 minutes – 6 times a week

Get used to fitting this into your routine before increasing the amount you do

Your long term goal is at least 30 minutes a day, 5 days of the week

Life-long Body Magic!

A survey of over 1,000 Slimming World members highlights clear increases in activity levels.

Members report a number of benefits from participation in activity such as, having more energy (37% of respondents), enjoying exercise now (33%), improved shape and posture (31%), being more mobile in daily life (29%), improved mood (25%), being calmer and less stressed (25%) and being able to sleep better (22%).

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Encouraging behaviour change

Body Magic helps facilitate behaviour change towards becoming more active by:

• Helping take the threat out of activity by removing psychological barriers and redefining what counts as activity
• Building confidence and expertise
• Motivating members to commit to a plan
• Providing ideas and solutions to help members increase activity levels
• Developing personal ‘foot out of the door’ strategies
• Supporting members in turning new skills into a routine
• Celebrating when members reach new milestones
• Continuing to support members until active living becomes a lifestyle

Steps to success

In group, members are encouraged to work towards Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum Body Magic awards, recording their actions on a FIT log (measuring Frequency, Intensity and Time).

The power of group sharing and support is used to inspire and encourage members in moving from a sedentary to an active lifestyle, no matter where their starting point.

Discussing activity in group helps members become more active and experience the benefits.

Before I joined Slimming World I would park the car as close as possible to my destination because I found walking just short distances so difficult. Since losing weight, I now cycle 40 miles a week, run 15 miles a week and play five-a-side football twice a week – and I love it. In fact there are so many things I can do that I couldn’t have even attempted when I was bigger – playing football with my nephews, buying clothes on the high street, going on a plane without needing a seatbelt extension and much more. Life really couldn’t be better.

Stuart Eggleshaw from Kirkby-in-Ashfield lost a stunning 22st 9lbs after joining his local Slimming World group, and discovered a passion for activity!

Bronze award

45 minutes per week

(spread over at least 3 sessions) maintained for 4 weeks

Silver award

6 x 15 minutes or 3 x 30 minutes per week maintained for 4 weeks

Gold award

10 x 15 minutes or 5 x 30 minutes per week maintained for 8 weeks

Platinum award

For life-long Body Magic! When active living is a lifestyle.

Slimming World has taken the ‘threat’ out of activity and devised a programme that can only have a very positive impact on the health, fitness and weight status of their members. This approach addresses psychological, then behavioural, and ultimately intrinsic commitment to activity.

Ken Fox, Emeritus Professor of Exercise and Health Sciences, University of Bristol
Free2Go: a tailored programme for adolescents

We offer membership free of charge to young people aged between 11 and 15 if their parent or guardian is a member and when we have the support and recommendations of the young person’s GP or nurse.

Family influence is a key factor in a young person’s eating habits and exercise routines. We encourage the whole family to make healthy lifestyle changes so that young people are not singled out, and we help parents to support their child in making these changes.

We encourage the young person to be involved in the decision making regarding food choices and activity. In the friendly and non-judgemental atmosphere of a Slimming World group, we focus on praise and encouragement whenever the young person makes even the smallest of changes.

By focusing on behaviour change rather than weight loss, we empower adolescents to take responsibility for developing their own personal route to healthy eating and activity.

Using age-tailored literature that encourages small changes we help young members plan what healthy changes they can make to their diet and work with them to develop ideas for becoming more active. Like all of our eating plans, there is no calorie-counting and no foods are forbidden. Instead we help them to gradually reduce the amount of energy dense foods they eat, like crisps, chocolate and fast food, and where possible swap to healthier lower energy dense choices like home-made burgers, fresh fruit and higher-fibre breakfast cereals.

We have developed a guidance booklet for health care professionals, Slimming World group Consultants and young members to use jointly to log and monitor the young member’s BMI and any recommended weight control targets. Progress is checked every three months using BMI reference charts developed by the Child Growth Foundation, which are adjusted for growth for this age group.

Young members following Slimming World’s Free2Go programme report a number of healthy lifestyle changes, along with positive reductions in BMI z-score\(^1\)\(^2\)\(^3\).

One published survey\(^4\) found that since joining Slimming World young members eat less unhealthy snack foods, less takeaways and fast food, less sugary drinks, less unhealthy pre-prepared meals such as pizza and chips, are less likely to just eat what they are given and are more likely to eat five portions of fruit and vegetables a day. They also report being more likely to now play a lot of sports, more likely to often be active and less likely to play a lot of computer games, watch a lot of television and avoid activity.

Young members participating in this survey had also lost a significant amount of weight (average change -5kg) while importantly still seeing a growth in height.

I am impressed that Slimming World’s programmes really are suitable for all. Not only is it vital that adolescents should be helped to achieve a healthy weight but it’s crucial that any woman considering conception achieves a healthy weight for her pregnancy, too."

Tam Fry FRSA, Honorary Chairman, Child Growth Foundation & Spokesperson, National Obesity Forum

“...I put on weight because I loved crisps and chocolate and at school I was called names because of my size. Then one day mum said: ‘Let’s show those bullies’ and she took me to Slimming World with her. I’m a lot happier now and I don’t get out of breath when I play football with my friends. I love helping mum cook tasty meals with fresh ingredients for the whole family to enjoy.”

14-year-old Taylor Sherer joined Slimming World with his mum Nicky in June 2007 and he lost a healthy 2st 6lbs!
Pregnancy and post-natal support

Slimming World is the only national weight management organisation in the UK to provide healthy lifestyle support to pregnant women and breast-feeding mums. Our aim is not to encourage weight loss or dieting during pregnancy but to support women in eating a healthy diet and prevent excess weight gain.

We worked in collaboration with The Royal College of Midwives to develop our policy on the best way to support our members during pregnancy. The RCM was pleased that Slimming World was able to offer this support and importantly to help women avoid excess weight gain, which can result in an increased chance of problems during pregnancy and birth. We are now working closely with The RCM, as Alliance partners, to continue to raise awareness of the right kind of weight management in pregnancy, ultimately to improve the health of women and their babies.

Slimming World encourages and helps women to lose weight before conceiving, supports members in eating healthily and remaining physically active during their pregnancy and encourages mothers to breast-feed and manage weight healthily following birth.

During a member’s pregnancy our support focuses on healthy lifestyle behaviours rather than weight loss. Food Optimising allows members to follow a healthy, balanced diet without calorie restriction, and our Body Magic programme encourages and supports members in finding their own personal and enjoyable way of building regular physical activity into daily life.

As there are no formal evidence-based guidelines on recommended weight gain during pregnancy and women are best advised by their health care team depending on individual circumstances, our members are required to gain support from their midwife to attend group while pregnant. Slimming World does not advise on weight change during a member’s pregnancy but will support the member in following a healthy lifestyle and achieving any goals or recommendations suggested by their health care team.

Slimming World recommends breast-feeding mums consume a varied, healthy diet to supply all the extra nutrients needed. We advise that they make additional choices from the Healthy Extras section and enjoy Free Foods which are rich in calcium rather than increasing their intake of high fat/sugary foods to supply the additional energy and nutrient needs.

Individual dietary needs

Food Optimising caters for members with special dietary requirements or conditions affected by diet, including diabetes, Coeliac disease, lactose intolerance and IBS.

The generosity and flexibility of Food Optimising, along with its focus on basic, everyday foods, means that it is suitable for practically every dietary requirement or preference.

Consultants and members have access to a variety of health factsheets to help them incorporate their dietary needs into Food Optimising, for example, highlighting gluten and dairy-free products and alternative Healthy Extra choices.

We also have a booklet available for members with diabetes which highlights Diabetes UK’s steps to healthy eating and how these easily fit within Food Optimising.

We always recommend members follow any medical and/or dietary advice they’re given by their health care team. Because Food Optimising allows members to choose the foods they wish to eat it is easy to incorporate specific requirements with the support of the group Consultants.

Our research

Our research highlights that members are given varying dietary advice for their diabetes management by their health professional, depending on individual needs. However in a survey of Slimming World members with diabetes, 89% of respondents found it easy to fit their personal dietary advice into their Food Optimising plan, enabling them to lose weight, improve glucose control and often reduce medication16. Over 90% of members surveyed in 2013 reported improvements in glucose control and 38% had been able to stop or reduce their diabetes medication.

Access for all

To help improve access to our group support, non-English speaking members are welcome to bring along a translator if they feel this would be beneficial.

Slimming World also has a variety of publications created especially to help members who are blind or partially sighted, hard-of-hearing or deaf. Audio CDs and Braille copies of new member support packs and a variety of recipe books are available. For partially sighted members, large-print copies of the new member packs can be provided.

Backed by experience of partnership work with Berkshire East PCT17, Slimming World supports members with learning difficulties in group, making use of more visuals to encourage the intake of low energy dense foods and healthier meal options. Anyone with learning difficulties or special needs who wishes to attend a Slimming World group is welcome to bring along a carer free of charge for additional help and support.

Slimming World’s approach supports members to make lifestyle changes for the future of both themselves and their family. It’s not about a quick fix or faddy diet but a healthy balanced diet to enhance good health. Through their programme they also encourage people to begin to build daily activity into their lives.

Karen Jewell, Consultant Midwife, Cardiff and Vale ULHB, is working with Slimming World to study the role of our healthy lifestyle programme in supporting women with their weight control during pregnancy.
Slimming World on Referral... a powerful practical partnership

Slimming World on Referral is a subsidised partnership enabling health practitioners to refer patients to a local Slimming World group for weekly weight management support at no cost to the patient.

Slimming World pioneered this NHS partnership programme with Greater and Central Derby Primary Care Trusts in 2001. The initial research study investigated the feasibility, practicalities and cost-effectiveness of referring patients from Primary Care into Slimming World groups18. As well as helping patients lose weight (average weight loss of those completing 12 weeks was 6.4%), significant improvements in mental well-being were reported after 12 weeks. Over 70% of those completing the free 12 weeks also went on to pay for their own continued membership (average weight loss in those completing 24 weeks was 11.3%).

Slimming World on Referral is now an established component of obesity care pathways in many areas of the UK. The majority of these are commissioned by Local Authority public health teams, although others are funded by CCGs, or individual practices. Since its nationwide roll out, the service continues to achieve clinical weight loss in many areas of the UK. The majority of these are commissioned by Local Authority public health teams, although others are funded by CCGs, or individual practices.

Benefits for you

Achieve your targets

Your targets for weight management can be met through Slimming World on Referral. Health improvement targets encourage an initial 5-10% decrease in body weight in 3-6 months. This is achieved in a significant percentage of patients referred15,16.

Build an audit

Slimming World on Referral provides an evidence base of patient attendance and weight loss. Health practitioners participating in the Slimming World on Referral scheme will receive regular audits free of charge from Slimming World.

Gain time

Slimming World on Referral should help you see less of your patients in every sense. In the long term, the health benefits of weight loss make such a difference in the lives of group members that they should be less frequent visitors to the health service.

Long term financial benefits

Referral patients benefit from noticeable improvements in health and wellbeing. Many Slimming World members report that they require less medication, including anti-hypertensive medication and diabetes treatment, and some no longer require any medication at all once they have lost weight successfully.

our research

Published audit of 34,271 participants who had accessed the service by November 200918:

- The mean BMI of referral patients was 36.8 kg/m². 25.4% were considered morbidly obese (BMI>40)
- Average attendance was 8.9 weeks (of possible 12)
- 58.1% attended at least 10 out of the 12 weeks
- Average weight loss of those attending at least 10 weeks was 5.5% (4.0% across total population)
- 54.7% of those attending at least 10 weeks lost > 5% bodyweight (35.8% of total population)
- 11% of those referred were men
- Men were just as likely to attend a significant number of sessions as women, with an average attendance of 9.2 weeks (compared with 8.8 weeks for women), and lost a greater amount of weight than women (5.8 kg (4.9%) vs. 3.8 kg (3.9%); p<0.001; men vs. women, respectively)

Next steps

If you would like to discuss commissioning a referral partnership in your area, please go to the following area of our health professional website at http://www.slimmingworld.co.uk/health/contact-us.aspx and send your details to the Partnerships team who will contact you to discuss your requirements.

Patient satisfaction and benefits

Patients are regularly surveyed to assess satisfaction levels and wider benefits of the referral service:

- 97% of referred patients report being satisfied with the service Slimming World has provided
- 98% report finding the groups enjoyable
- 75% of referred patients tell us they plan to continue attending a Slimming World group after their referral
- 91% say they feel better about themselves as a result of the referral

“...Our partnership with Slimming World has been a great success for members of the public and our own staff. It has enabled us to offer people choices on how they want to lose weight, while complementing our existing NHS Calderdale Healthy Weight Service. The support from Slimming World has been fantastic in helping us to achieve our objectives. As well as helping participants to lose weight, it has improved their confidence and self-esteem and encouraged them to become more active.”

Marie Conway, Health Improvement Lead
NHS Calderdale

How does Slimming World on Referral work?

The Slimming World on Referral service includes patient referral packs, regular audits, staff training and administrative costs covered free of charge – all easily accessed by your team.

- Information provided by Slimming World to you and your patients includes details of where to access a local Slimming World group and what to expect at the group.
- Packs are supplied to cover the joining fee and attendance in 12 week blocks.
- A further enhanced service is available which includes a readiness to change assessment and post-service evaluation.
- Referred patients can access any Slimming World group of their choice. All members, whether referred or not, are treated in the same warm and friendly way.
- After 12 weeks, patients may elect to carry on attending their Slimming World group and say the weekly fee themselves. If, however, a health practitioner feels it is appropriate, they may offer further 12-week periods of attendance. In this way provision of subsidised support can be targeted long-term towards those who are income-disadvantaged, while other patients are able to continue at their own cost.
- Slimming World on Referral patients, like all Slimming World members, are awarded lifetime membership once they reach their personal target weight. They can then continue to meet with their group every week for as long as they like, completely free of charge.

commercial weight management organisations have identified a means of expanding provision of obesity services in primary care2 as they have the benefit of resource, infrastructure and scale, which enables them to offer regular support.

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What training do Slimming World Consultants receive?

The quality of our service is delivered through our people and we maintain our very high standards by selecting only the very best to become Slimming World Consultants, staff and managers. There is a strong management support structure with regular training and a real emphasis on quality of service provision. All Consultants are recruited from successful group members and are carefully selected through an interview process to ensure they have the necessary skills to empower and support people in their weight management.

Slimming World has a dedicated training department which, within the Slimming World Academy, co-ordinates the development and delivery of tailored training to all of its Consultants and managers. Slimming World Consultants receive specific training in dietary aspects of weight management, the role of physical activity in weight control and importantly, advanced training in behaviour change. The training is supported by a team of registered nutritionists and dietitians at Slimming World’s Head Office.

How long do members stay?

Members can access our groups for as long as they feel they need our support. Slimming World groups have the benefit of not being limited in the number of weeks’ support we can offer, so if a member has a lot of weight to lose we can support them through their whole journey. Past members are always free to re-join if they feel they need support once again in managing their weight, and for some this practice of re-joining when needed is a very effective way of managing their weight long term. Welcoming members back in a non-critical, non-judgemental way is key for their success.

What are your long term success rates?

On average members lose around 8% in 6 months and around 13% by 12 months. Member retention is a key measure of successful weight management. 55% of the members are retained each month and the average length of stay in well established groups exceeds 52 weeks. We regularly have 75,000 members attending free of charge to maintain their personally chosen target weight. However, we do not measure our success by the number of attending target members as many decide to visit the group less frequently and some decide they are happy to “go it alone” once they reach a target they are happy with. Our aim is to empower members to make lifestyle changes to manage their weight – changes which they can comfortably make for life.

Do you have other options for people not wanting to attend group?

For those people who are unable to attend a local group, Slimming World offers a web-based weight loss programme based on the same healthy eating plan, the same step-by-step activity programme and empowering support towards behaviour change using online versions of the motivational tools used in groups.

Can men join?

Most certainly! Slimming World has around 40,000 members who are men and 222 male Consultants. When they make the decision to join, we find that men generally achieve excellent weight losses in Slimming World groups. We find that men generally achieve excellent weight losses in Slimming World groups.

We often find that men are generally more focused when they start on a healthy eating plan, with less social pressures than women feel, and fewer negative feelings about previous attempts to lose weight. Men tell us they appreciate the fact that, due to the generosity and flexibility of Slimming World’s healthy eating plans, they don’t have to give up the foods they love most, whether that be basic carbs or curry for example.
For further information please contact:

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