

# Supporting postnatal women to lose weight

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## Background

Women find it difficult to lose excess weight gained during pregnancy. As they have more children weight can increase progressively which is more difficult to manage and increases risk of complications in future pregnancies<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, the postnatal period is a key time to support women in managing their weight. Over 90% of Slimming World group members are female and many join to obtain support in losing weight gained during pregnancy.

The aim of this research was to assess whether the needs of this important population group were being met through the weekly group support.

## Methods

A survey of members attending Slimming World (SW) up to 2 years postnatal was hosted on the member's website for 2 weeks. Self reported weight and heights were collected for various time points.

Respondents were asked about changes in eating and activity habits and general well-being since they had joined. Likert 5 point scales were used to assess changes in behaviour. A positive result indicates an increase in the behaviour.

## Results

590 members completed the questionnaire. 84 (14%) respondents had joined SW either before they became pregnant or whilst pregnant. The remainder (506) joined after having a baby; 86% said having a baby influenced their decision to join. The majority joined at <26 wks (48%) or at >1yr (28%) after giving birth.

### Mean (SD) weight and BMI changes

- Pre-pregnancy BMI of respondents (n=576) = 30.1kg/m<sup>2</sup> (6.1)
- Of those who joined SW postnatal (n=506), BMI on joining = 33.6kg/m<sup>2</sup> (6.9)
- Of those already SW members when they became pregnant (n=67), BMI on joining = 33.5kg/m<sup>2</sup> (7.4)
- BMI at time of survey, i.e. since attending SW (n=582) = 30.7kg/m<sup>2</sup> (6.5)
- 43% of respondents (n=590) said they had reached their pre-pregnancy weight and 41% said they are now lighter than before becoming pregnant
- Of those who had been members for >6mths (n=152), 57% had reached their pre-pregnancy weight and 55% are lighter than before becoming pregnant
- 79% of respondents (n=590) said they were happy with their rate of weight loss and 97% would still like to lose more weight
- Of those who had had previous pregnancies (n=309) 72% said they had been unable to lose previous pregnancy weight

### Changes in eating habits, activity habits and general well-being

- Respondents reported eating more regularly, cooking more meals from fresh ingredients, eating more fruit and veg and eating fewer unhealthy snacks since joining SW (Fig 1)
- 76% reported being generally more active since joining with appropriate shifts in lifestyle behaviour e.g. going for more walks and watching TV less (Fig 2)
- They also reported improvements in self-esteem, self-confidence and general well-being since joining (Fig 3)
- 438 (74%) respondents breastfed their babies, and of these, 57% breastfed >6wks
- The majority found it very easy (48%) or quite easy (32%) to attend the weekly group

Fig 1: Change in eating habits since joining Slimming World

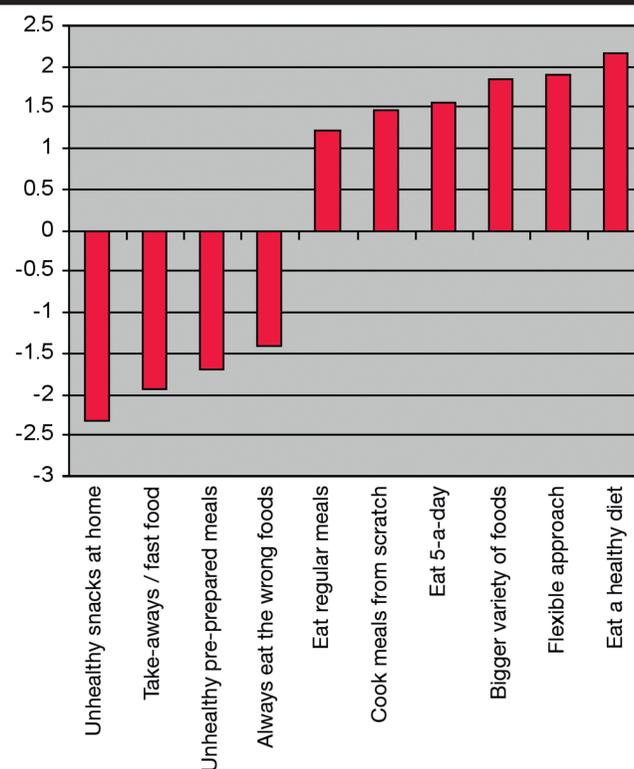


Fig 2: Change in physical activity since joining Slimming World

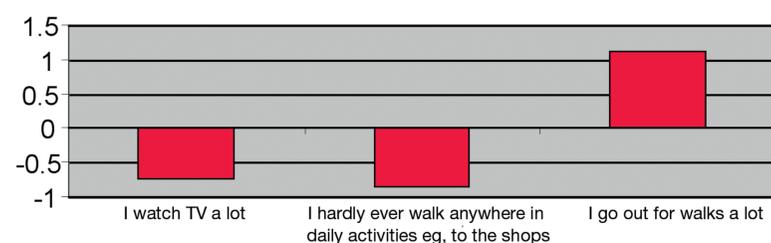
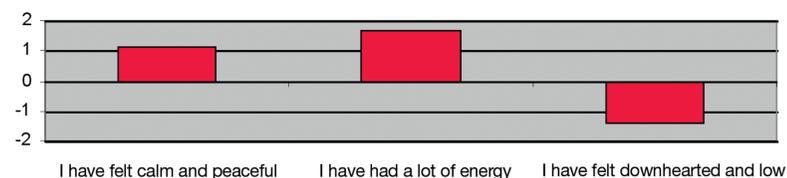


Fig 3: Change in feelings of well-being since joining Slimming World



## Discussion

**Slimming World supports over 300,000 members in their weekly groups, the majority being female. Many join to obtain support in losing weight gained during pregnancy, thus enabling them to enter subsequent pregnancies in a healthier position. This data suggests that the programme does help postnatal women to adopt healthy lifestyle habits, lose weight and also to feel better about themselves.**

1. Villamor, E. & Cnattingius, S. 2006. Interpregnancy weight change and risk of adverse pregnancy outcomes: a population-based study. *Lancet*, 368(9542):1164-1170

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