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Weight Loss: The Headlines

From the relatively benign “Commercial weight-loss programs offer little evidence of success” to the more provocative “It’s all hype: Few commercial weight-loss programs are effective,” it appeared the researchers at Johns Hopkins threw a gigantic wrench into the \$2.5 billion commercial weight loss industry (1). After all, if the programs don’t work, why would anyone want to fork out the money? Or maybe, just maybe, this was more hype than anything else; let’s take a look.



A group of physicians and students from Johns Hopkins School of Medicine performed a search using traditional scientific and medical search engines. Their objective was to find randomized controlled trials of commercially available weight loss programs that lasted longer than 12 weeks.

Of the 32 programs they identified, only 45 studies met the criteria, and only a few lasted a year or more. The researchers identified Weight Watchers and Jenny Craig as worthy of recommendation by physicians to their obese patients because of the quality of studies to support the effectiveness of their program.

Are we doomed if we don’t use those programs? Of course not, because many people have lost weight and kept it off using just about every approach imaginable, including other commercially available weight loss programs. It comes down to the purpose of the study; I’ll cover that on Thursday.

What are you prepared to do today?

Dr. Chet

Reference: Ann Intern Med. 2015;162(7):501-512. doi:10.7326/M14-2238.

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