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# Intentional Weight Loss: More Harm Than Good?



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## Questions to investigate...

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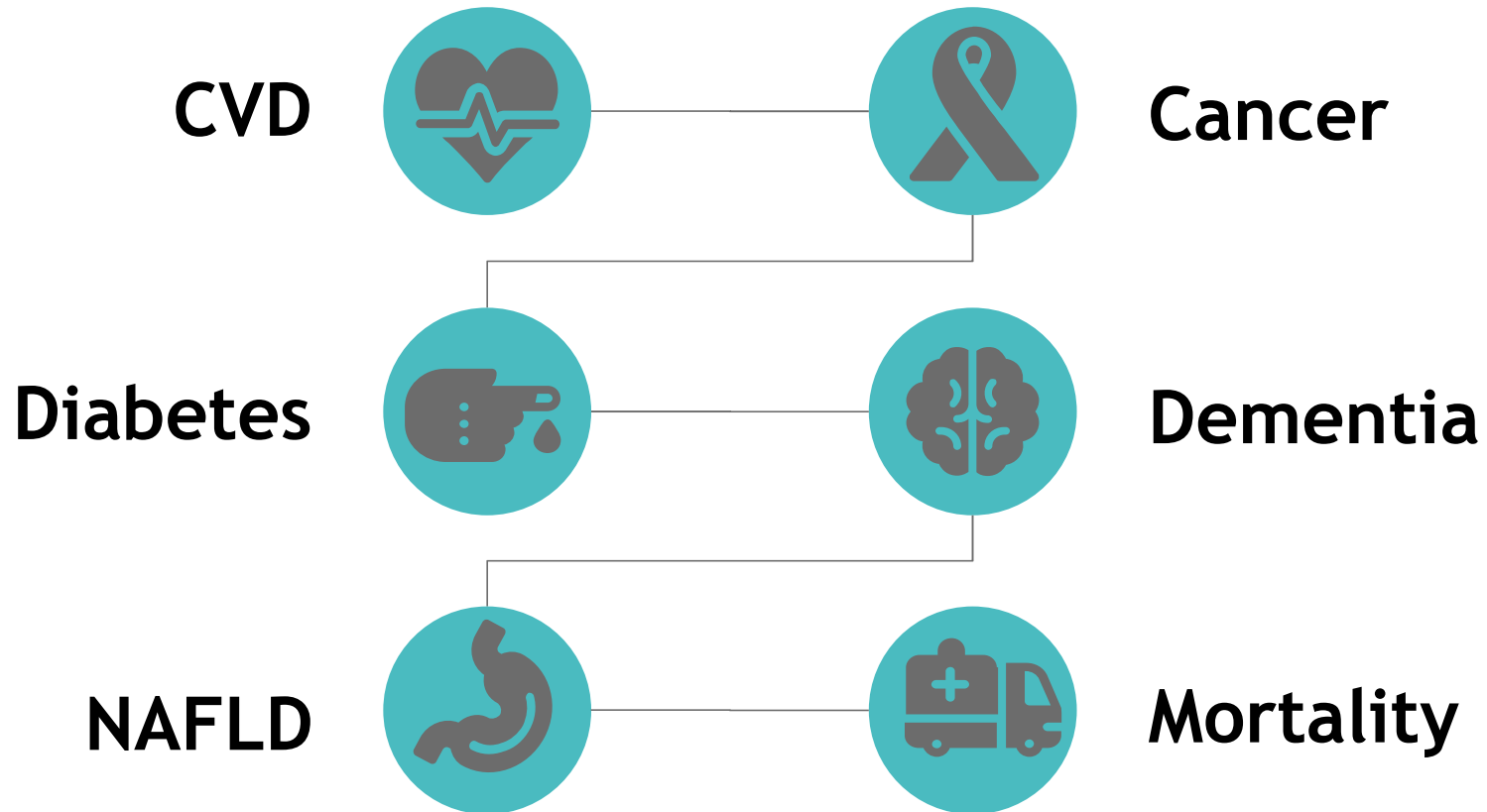
- Do weight loss diets improve health?
- Is weight loss actually possible to maintain?
- Can weight loss interventions cause harm?
- Is it harmful to perpetuate the message that weight loss is a beneficial goal to pursue?
- Ultimately, do weight loss interventions do more harm or more good?



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Do weight loss diets improve health?

# Obesity-related Disorders



REVIEW ARTICLE









**Benefits of weight loss of 10% or more in patients with overweight or obesity: A review**

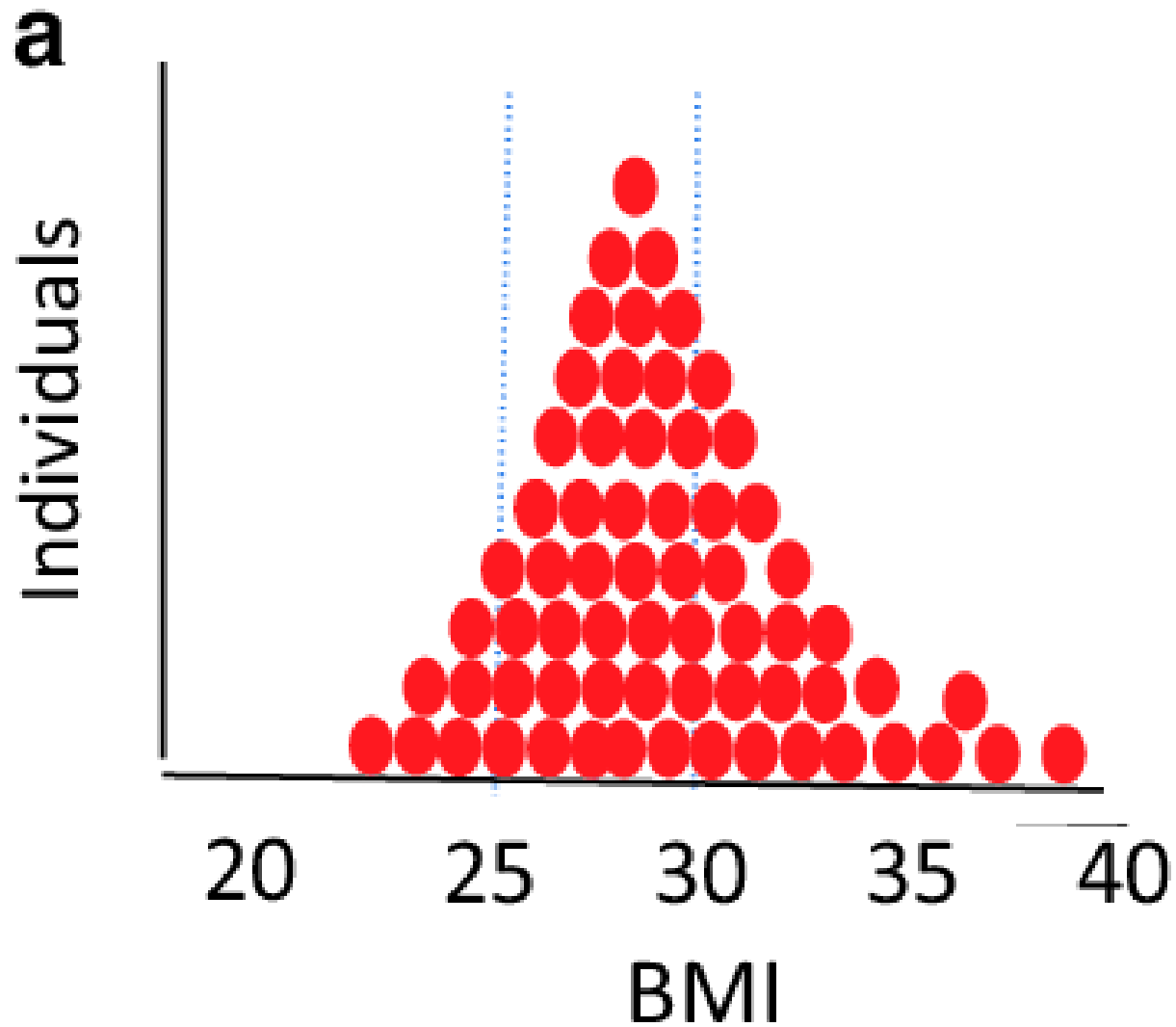
Abd A. Tahrani, John Morton ✉

First published: 25 March 2022

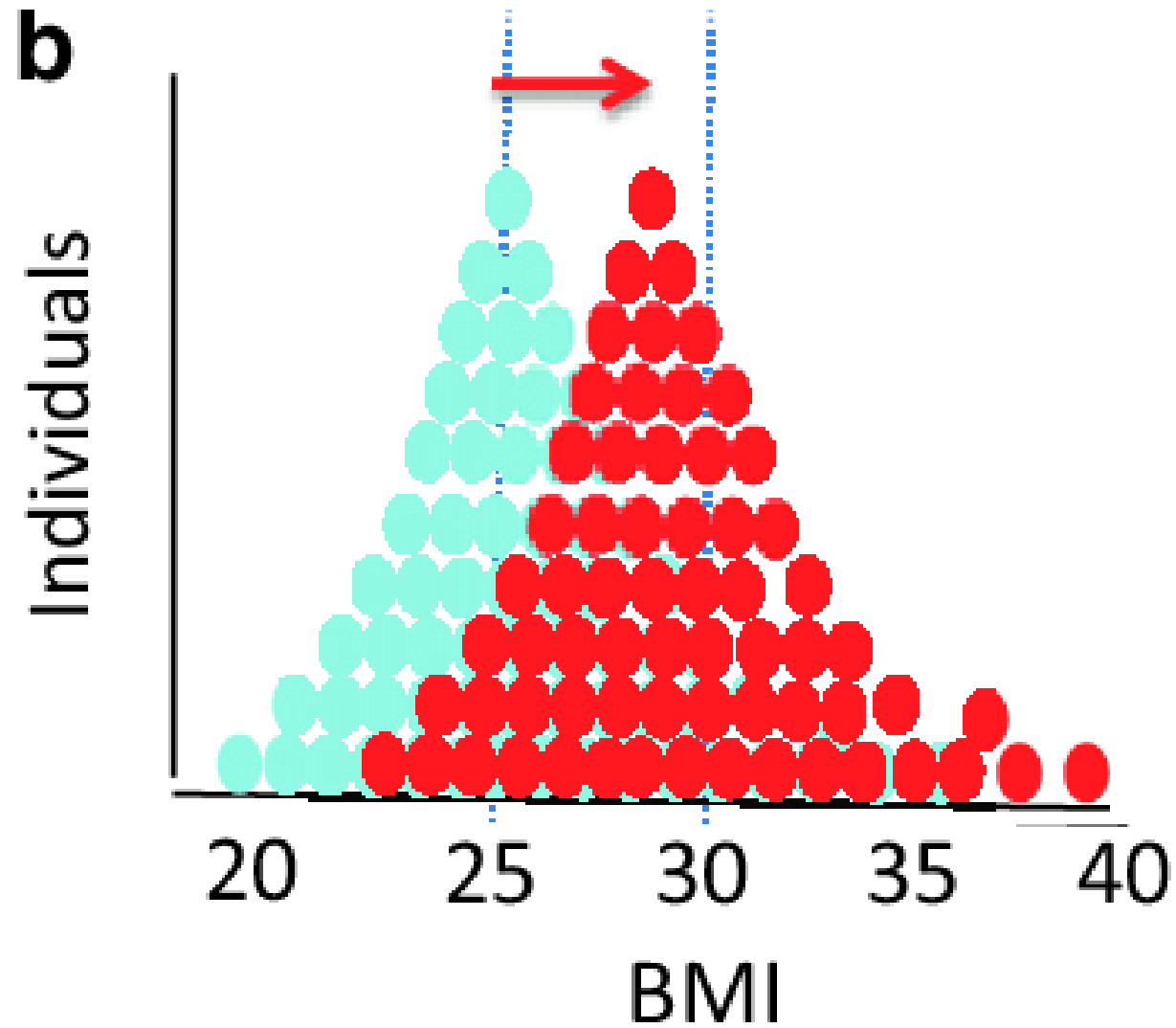
<https://doi.org/10.1002/oby.23371>

Tahrani & Morton, Obesity (Silver Spring). 2022 Apr;30(4):802-840

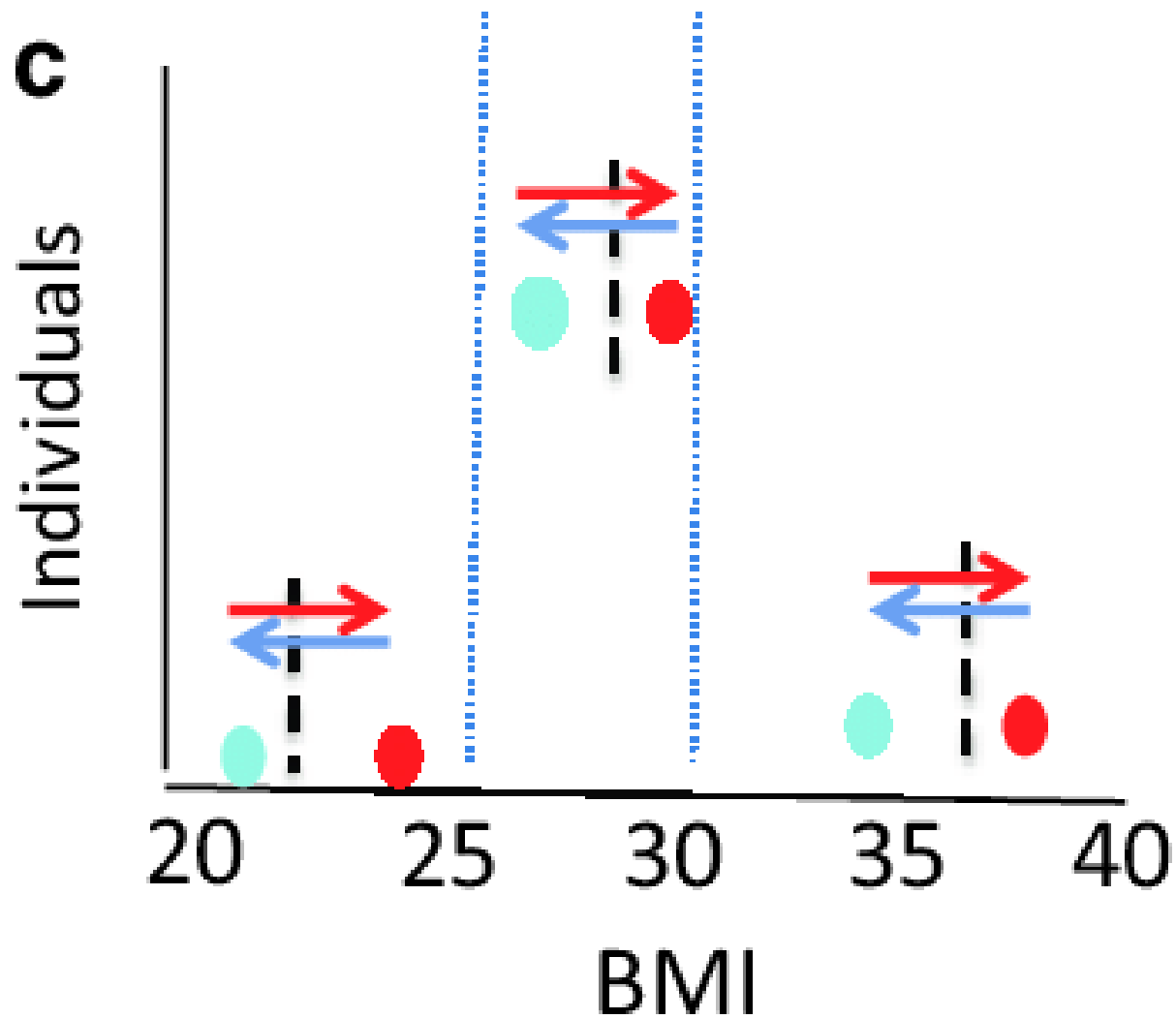
Comorbidity	Improvement?
Type 2 diabetes	
Hypertension	
Glucose metabolism	
CVD risk factors	
Knee osteoarthritis	
Sleep apnoea	
Fertility-related end points	
Health-related quality of life	



Zhyzhneuskaya & Taylor, Obesity and Type 2 Diabetes, In: Obesity, pg 195-226.



Zhyzhneuskaya & Taylor, Obesity and Type 2 Diabetes, In: Obesity, pg 195-226.



Zhyzhneuskaya & Taylor, Obesity and Type 2 Diabetes, In: Obesity, pg 195-226.



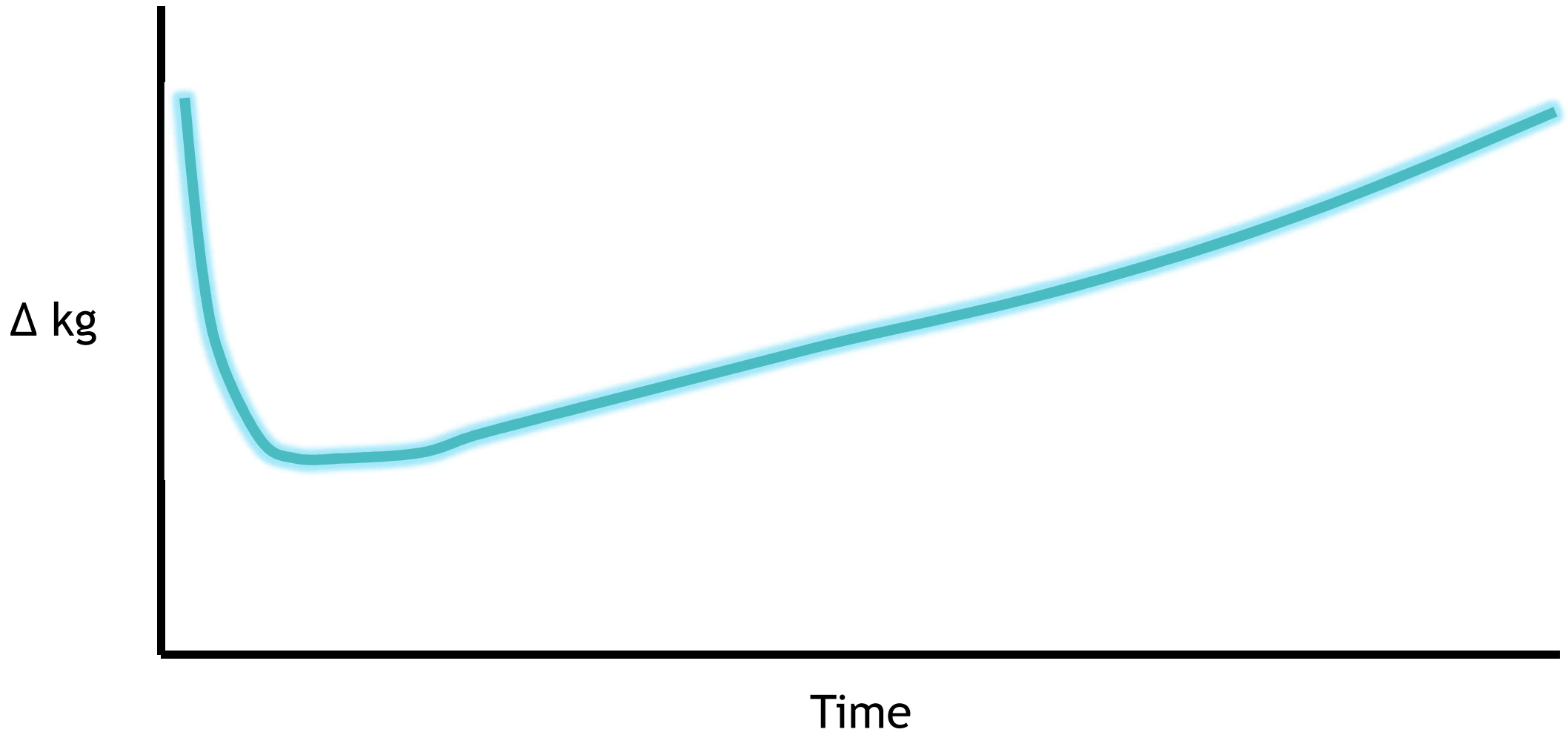
But...



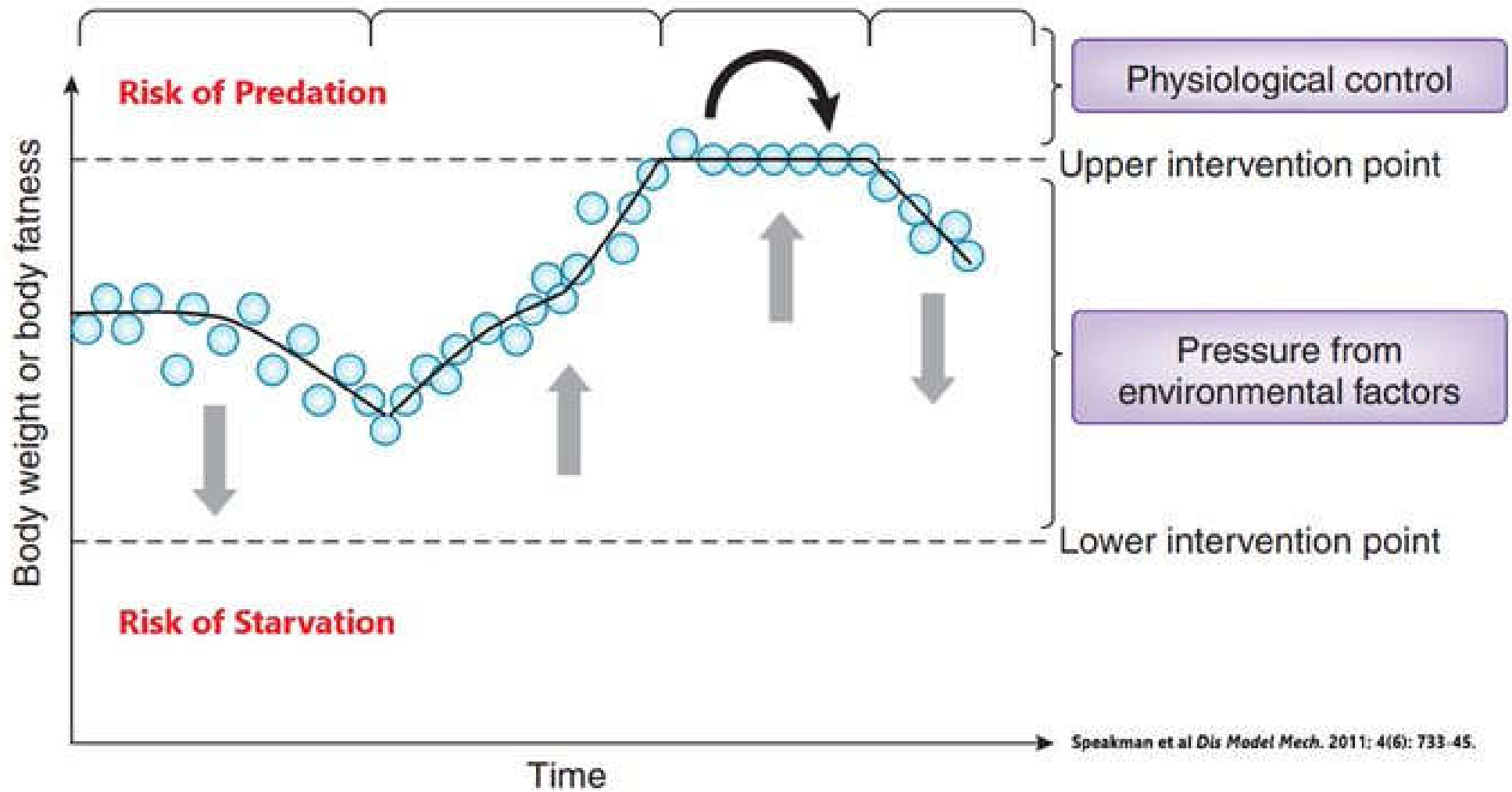


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Is weight loss actually possible to maintain?



Hall & Kahan, Med Clin North Am. 2018 Jan; 102(1): 183-197.



Speakman et al., *Dis Model Mech.* 2011 Nov;4(6):733-45

## Where we're at...

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- Weight loss can bring about positive health improves
- But... weight loss maintenance is difficult and perhaps not possible for many
- So where do we go?

Dieting is pointless.  
Never attempt it.



Why not  
recommend it  
anyway?  
No harm in trying!

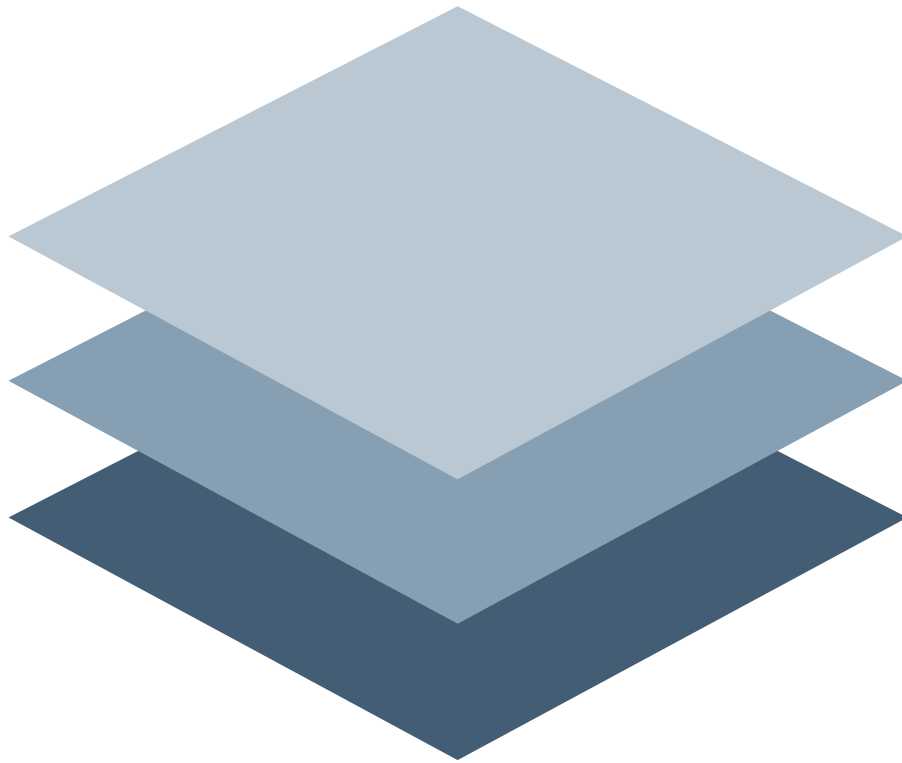


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Can weight loss interventions cause harm?

## Wait, there are harms?

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- Harms of the diet
- Harms of failing to “be successful”
- Harms of the message being perpetuated

# Harms of the actual fat loss diet

LBM mass loss



Low energy availability



Preoccupation with weight or food



Disordered eating behaviours



[1] Wing, Obesity, 2021 Aug;29(8):1246-1258.

[2] Areta et al., Eur J Appl Physiol. 2021 Jan;121(1):1-21

[3] Bacon & Aphramor, Nutr J. 2011; 10: 9

[4] Linardon, Appetite. 2018 Aug 1;127:126-129.



## Harms of being told to diet or reduce body weight

88%

Reported being stigmatised due to their weight

42%

Felt uncomfortable talking to their GP about their weight

26%

“... treated with dignity & respect by HCPs when seeking advice or treatment about their weight.

Brown et al., EClinicalMedicine. 2022 Apr 21;47:101408



“But it will motivate them to change!”

## Calorie intake?

Weight stigma **increases** calorie consumption [1]

## Weight Loss?

Internalised bias associated with **poorer** weight loss & weight loss maintenance [4]

## Eating behaviour?

Internalising negative weight based stereotypes leads to **worse**, not better, eating behaviors [2]

## Go to the gym?

Those who experience stigma are more likely to **avoid** the gym [3]

## Push the public?

The most positive & motivating public health messages were those that focused on making healthy behavioural changes **without** reference to body weight [4]

[1] Schvey et al., Obesity (Silver Spring). 2011 Oct;19(10):1957-62.

[2] Puhl et al., Obesity (Silver Spring). 2007 Jan;15(1):19-23

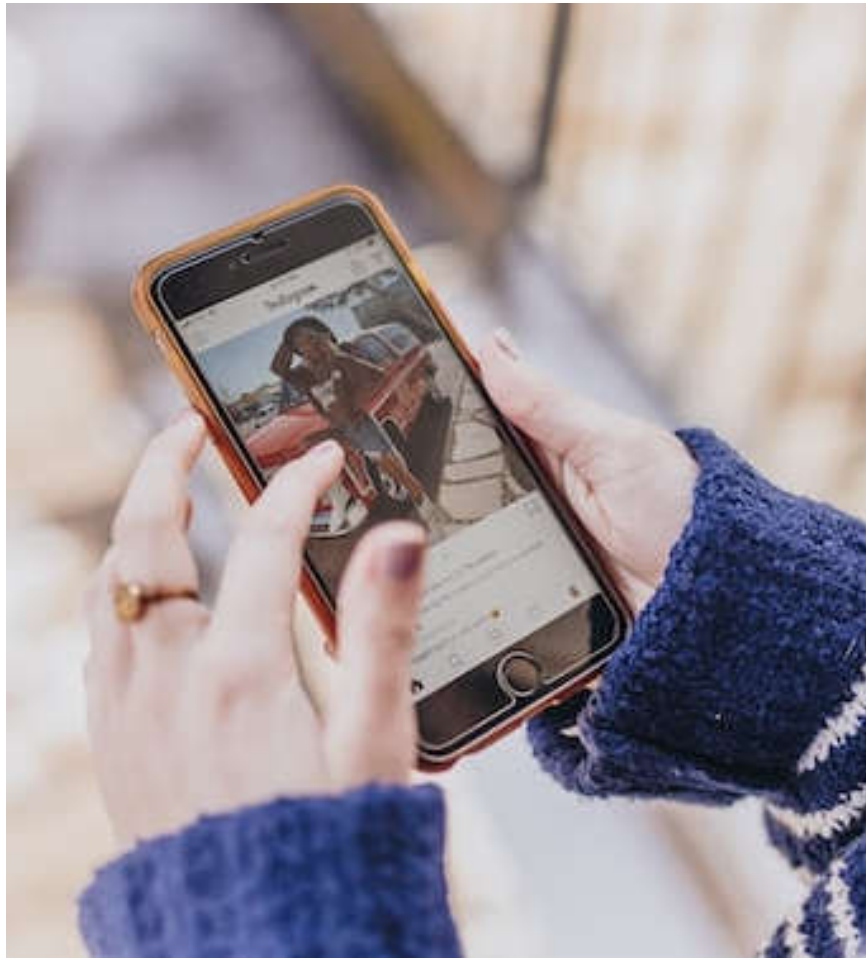
[3] Lessard et al., Obesity (Silver Spring). 2021 un;29(6):966-970

[4] Brown et al., EClinicalMedicine. 2022 JApr 21;47:101408



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Is it harmful to perpetuate the message that weight loss is a beneficial goal to pursue?



## One

If people are focused on aesthetics, is the fitness industry setting an **unattainable goal**?

The expert they are following likely has a physique that is just not attainable.

## Two

Are our messages implicitly saying:  
*“if you want to be healthy (accepted/loved), you need to lose weight”?*

# Health-promoting behaviours (independent of weight loss)

- Diet quality
- Exercise and physical activity
- Sleep
- Social interactions
- Relationships
- Therapy
- Drugs





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Ultimately, do weight loss interventions do more harm or more good?



“Weight loss is **always** beneficial for those living with obesity or overweight”

“Aiming for weight loss is **never** appropriate”



Does dieting improve health?

Is successful maintenance possible?

What do we mean by “dieting”?

What do we mean by “improve health”?

What do we mean by “success”?

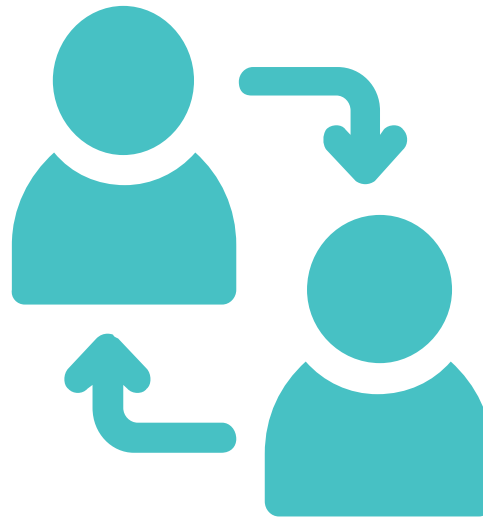


“... there is a need for tools to **identify potential responders** to weight-loss treatment and to **evaluate who will benefit** from this treatment in terms of cardiometabolic risk at the level of the **individual.**”

- Tahrani & Morton, 2022

Is weight loss  
contraindicated for this  
person? At this time?

Is the approach from a  
psychologically healthy  
framing?



## Screening

Why is this person dieting?

What do they expect they  
will gain from it?

Are other factors the  
“root cause” that need to  
be addressed?

# Persisting Intervention and Support

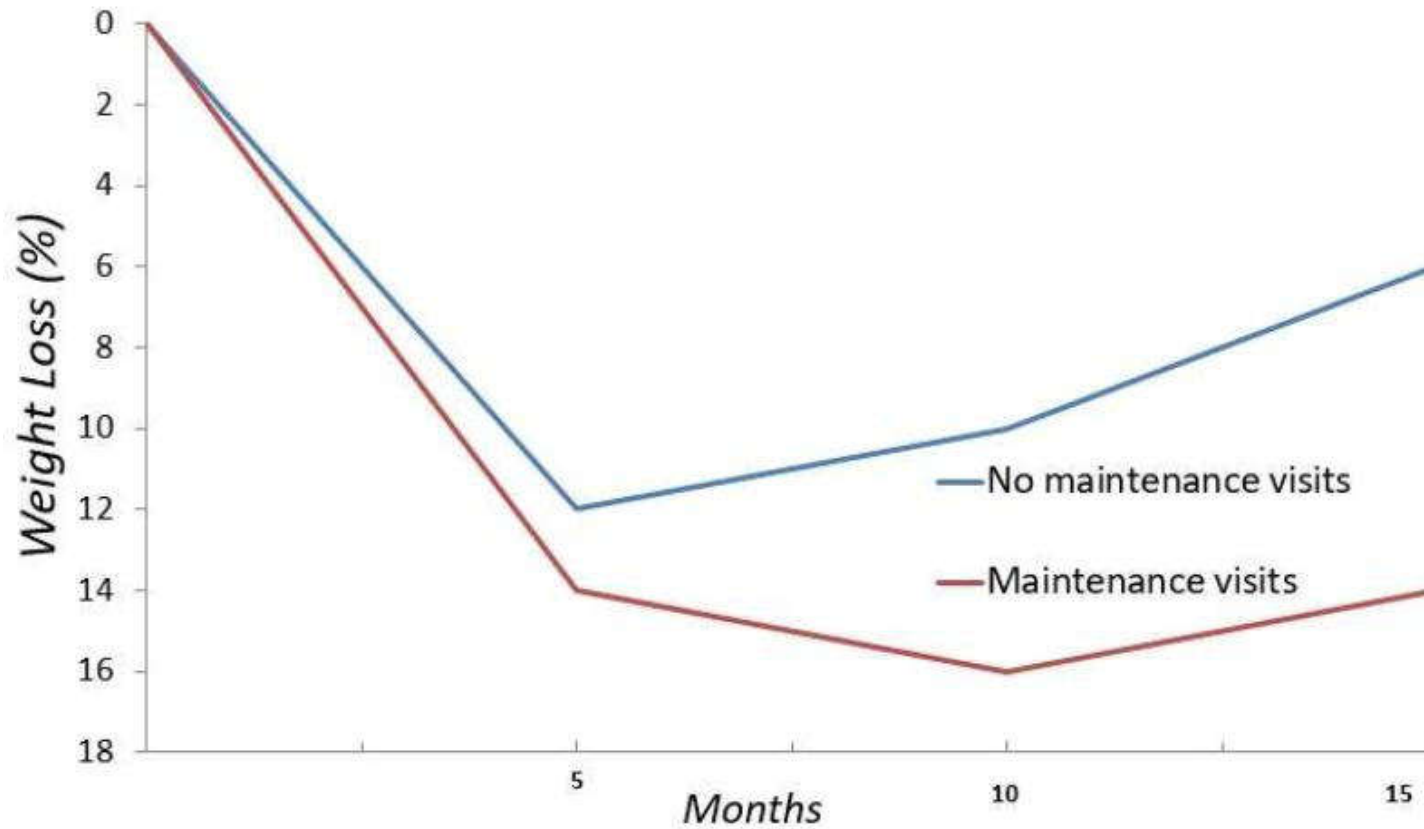
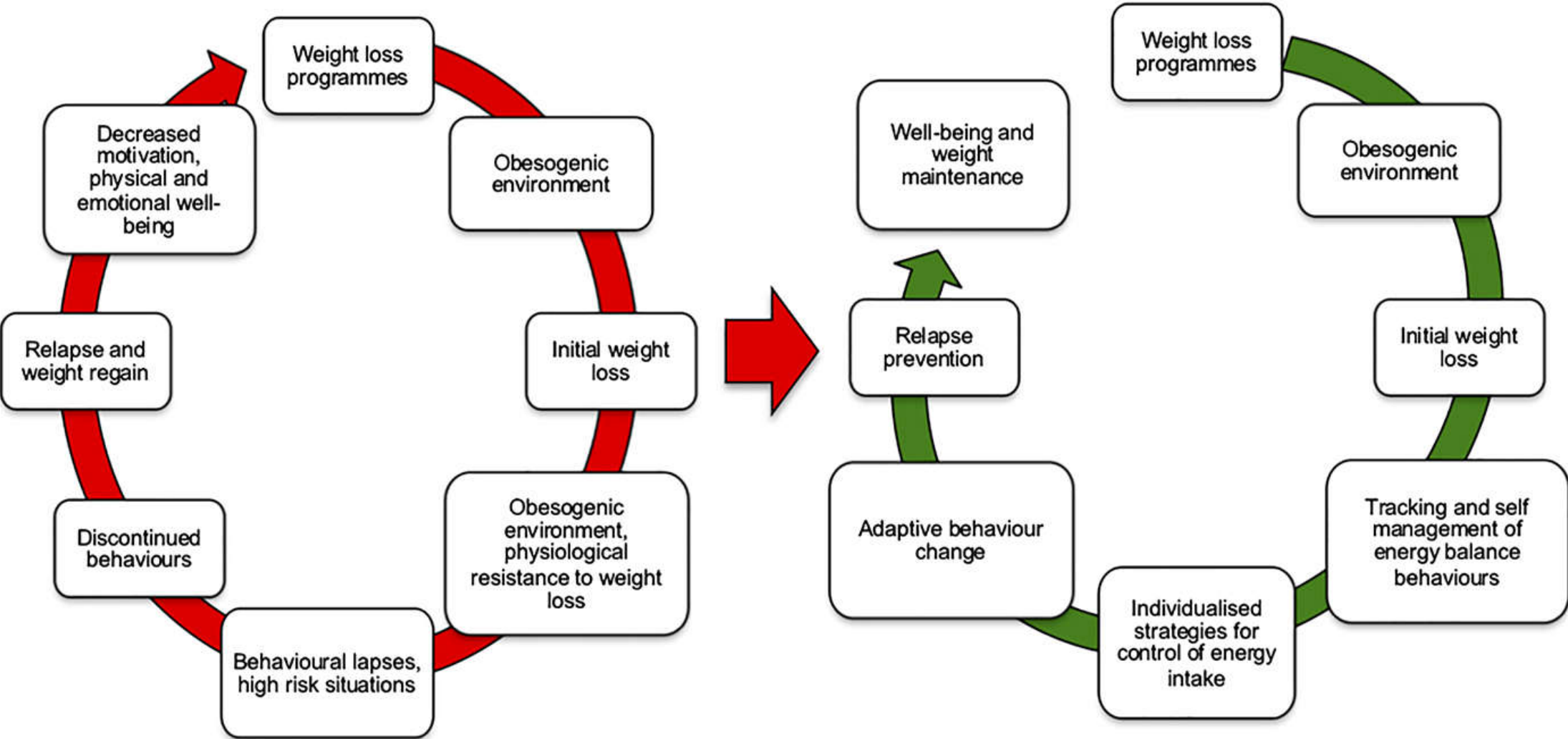


Image from: Hall & Kahan, Med Clin North Am. 2018 Jan; 102(1): 183-197  
Originally adapted from: Perri et al., J Consult Clin Psychol 1988;56(4):529-534



Stubbs et al., Proc Nutr Soc. 2019 Nov;78(4):576-589

## Increasing Likelihood of WLM

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Higher levels of self-determined motivation



Higher levels of intrinsic motivation for exercise



Self-efficacy



Internal locus of control



Decreased overeating in response to feelings, thoughts, and emotions



Flexible eating restraint



Improved body image

## Thoughts to consider...

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- People go on fat loss diets other than health reasons.
- People living without obesity or overweight go on diets.
- In such contexts, what is a fat loss diet improving?
- Will it actually do this?
- Would other interventions better address these outcomes? (e.g. therapy)
- How many of these outcomes are a result of problematic narratives within the fitness industry and wider society?



# SUMMARY

1. Weight loss can meaningfully improve health
2. But it is difficult to achieve and maintain
3. And comes with risks: WL interventions are not benign
4. The weight loss (and maintenance) intervention matters
5. Some benefits may be achievable without weight loss
6. For some, advising weight loss is contraindicated
7. On an individual level, we need to know for who, and/or when, weight loss is appropriate





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Further Reading & References



[sigmanutrition.com/mnu22](https://sigmanutrition.com/mnu22)





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# THANKS!



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