

Introduction

The majority of the population in the United States (U.S.) experiences at least one weight-related issue, indicating this is a significant public health concern.¹ These weight-related issues and disorders range from overweight and obesity to eating disorders and unhealthy weight control behaviors.¹ In 2017–2018, the age-adjusted prevalence of obesity in adults was 42.4%.² Women had a higher prevalence of severe obesity (11.5%) than men (6.9%). From 1999–2000 through 2017–2018, the prevalence of both obesity and severe obesity increased among adults.² Americans spend more than \$40 billion dollars a year on dieting and diet-related products. That is roughly equivalent to the amount in the U.S. Federal Government spends on education each year.³ Research indicates that dieting is rarely sustainable and that 95% of all dieters regain their lost weight and more within 1 to 5 years.³

Intuitive eating is about trusting your inner body wisdom to make choices about food that feel good in your body, without judgment and without influence from diet culture.⁴ A developing approach of intuitive eating is a peace movement; it is ending the war with your body, learning to accept our diverse genetic blueprint. Diet culture would have us believe all the rules we have about food as gospel because they are all, in some way, focused on the thin ideal that anybody other than a thin one, is wrong.⁴ Intuitive eating is built on a set of 10 principles; reject the diet mentality, honor your hunger, make peace with food, challenge the food police, discover the satisfaction factor, feel your fullness, cope with your emotions and kindness, respect your body, movement, and feel the difference.⁵ The purpose of this review of literature was to explore how an intuitive eating approach may promote weight loss and maintenance, psychological health when compared to traditional weight loss approaches.

Methods

The research that contributes to this literature review focused intuitive eating and weight maintenance. This research also focused on comparing traditional weight loss to intuitive eating. The databases that were used included Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (JAND), Angelo & Jennette Volpe Library. The statistics and additional information were gathered from the already obtained research from the CDC

Definitions

ACT(acceptance commitment therapy)- A focus on avoidance by helping the participants relate psychological flexibility to interfere with their own private events and regulate their behavior based on personal beliefs and goals instead of emotional thoughts or experiences

Disinhibition- inability to control

Hunger Training- Hunger training is a method where participants connect their physical symptoms of hunger with blood glucose levels.¹³

Results

Bacon and Stern concluded that adhering to a strict diet can have a significant effect on self-esteem and other self-evaluation measurements. Conversely, the health at every size approach helped the participants accept all they are in their body and rely on signals like hunger cues to help support positive behaviors. Positive behaviors have a great influence in our diet, and the intuitive eating approach may help to develop mindfulness and positive psychological flexibility. Diet mentality has shown to affect both a person's psychological health along with nutritional status.

Willig's study was conducted to look at a sample African American woman and examine their nutritional beliefs and how they perceive current eating behavior such as intuitive eating.⁷ The study had findings demonstrating that intuitive eating could help improve adherence to dietary practices to help better control glycemic measurements.⁷ This study demonstrated a need for intervention tools to help manage hunger cues among African American women with type two diabetes.⁷ Research on intuitive eating related to diabetes is limited so whether or not intuitive eating programs will affect the diabetes population needs to be researched further.⁷

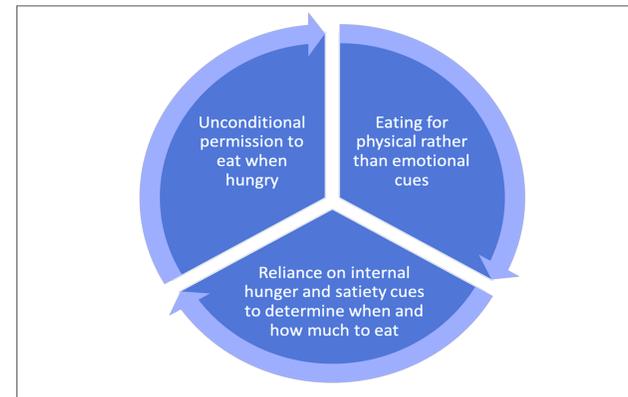
A study by Schaefer et al explored registered dietitians' knowledge and attitudes toward the intuitive eating lifestyle approach and described the use of traditional weight management practices and the non-restrictive lifestyle practices with clients.⁸

Sairanen et al explored the ideas of psychological flexibility and mindfulness as possible self-regulation processes that could help promote adaptive eating behaviors such as intuitive eating, and ultimately offer new approaches and effective weight management. Sairanen et al concluded that the component of eating for physical rather than emotional reasons, a determining factor for intuitive eating, had a significant increase with face-to-face intervention along with mobile groups when compared to the control group. However, there was no significant increase from post to follow up at 36 weeks.⁹ Results showed psychological flexibility for weight improvement with the ACT face-to-face and mobile groups.⁹ The subscales awareness and non-reactive in mindfulness skills improved more in the ACT mobile groups than in face-to-face groups.⁹

Gravel et al conducted a study that explored whether or not eating related attitudes and behaviors among dietary restrained women were influenced by sensory-based intervention. Learning sensory-based approaches supports a person's ability to self-regulate and organize emotions in a more adaptive and effective way.¹² The sensory based interventions, included exploring global concepts, hunger and satiety cues, and senses such as taste.¹¹ This was a randomized control study where women were assigned to a specific intervention group for six weeks where they met with a registered dietitian who counseled six free 90-minute workshops on specific topics.¹¹ Findings from the three-factor eating questionnaire found the women in the intervention group had a significant decline in disinhibition and situational susceptibility to disinhibition.¹¹ Sensory based interventions have been effective in non-restrictive approaches.¹¹ Focusing on positive change in the diet may, in the long run, effectively decrease disinhibition and not increase dietary restraint.¹¹

Jospe conducted a study that researched hunger training methods as a way to help participants recognize hunger cues. Jospe examined hunger training and how it may lead to an increase in intuitive eating while decreasing emotional eating as participants gain an awareness of appetite signals. A total of 36 participants completed the six-month assessment. Analysis of hunger training adherence had 34 participants as two of the 36 participants who were weighed at six months did not return hunger training booklets.¹³ The study determined that, on average, the participant in the hunger training lost approximately 4.9 kg between 0 to 6 months and 5.3 kg between 0 and 12 months.¹³ The data showed that 60 days using copies of the booklets had the best outcome. Weight loss was significantly correlated with filling in the hunger training booklets.¹³ Jospe et al concluded that even though intuitive eating has not been successful for weight loss it appears to be beneficial for maintaining weight over a period of time. In addition, they found that adhering to 60 or more days of hunger training correlated with a decrease in non-hungry eating while increasing the need to only eat if food hungry, which then indicated a beneficial change in eating behavior.

A study by Schaefer et al explored registered dietitians' knowledge and attitudes toward the intuitive eating lifestyle approach and described the use of traditional weight management practices and the non-restrictive lifestyle practices with clients.⁸ This research study determined that RDNs were using a more non-restrictive and intuitive eating approach than traditional restrictive weight loss practices and it supported the new weight management paradigm.⁸ Although the intuitive eating approach is not part of the curriculum to become a RDN, the research shows that RDNs have a positive attitude about intuitive eating. The research has shown that intuitive eating is inversely associated with disordered eating and the ideology of being thin, so in the future intuitive eating may be a successful weight management and maintenance intervention.⁸



This image demonstrates the balance of intuitive eating cues.

Conclusion

An intuitive eating approach can have positive effects on an individual's weight loss goal, psychological flexibility, and maintenance of weight over time.⁶ The intuitive eating lifestyle may help promote self-esteem and help clients to feel better about themselves.⁶ Diet groups reported having a lower self-esteem and an increase in dietary restraint.⁶ Researchers found that an intuitive eating approach helps to maintain weight over time versus traditional diets that help lose weight but have gradual regain over time.^{6,13} A social stigma and a sense of guilt in the diabetes culture prevent the African American women from enhancing glycemic control.⁷ The stigma around "diabetic diet" also made it difficult for women to shop, meal plan, and even inform family and friends of their diagnosis.⁷ Participants had knowledge and decreased levels of adherence in disinhibition, awareness, external cues, distraction and emotional response.⁷ Willig found intuitive interventions may promote self-efficacy and increase the awareness of intuitive eating.⁷ A study found when health at every size mentality, a body acceptance non diet group, had more success with attrition rates, maintaining weight, increasing physical activity, and disinhibition all from interventions that focus on an intuitive eating approach.⁶ Weight-related psychological flexibility interventions like ACT helped increase reliance on hunger and satiety cues and eating for physical rather than emotional reasons.⁹ ACT interventions showed to have success on psychological flexibility which may help mediate change for an intuitive eating approach.⁹ Intuitive eating practices were more perceived by women RDN's, those in private practice and higher education, along with RDN's with more experience.⁸

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