

Study Examines Group-based Internet Obesity Treatment

[Delia West](#), professor of [exercise science](#) and SmartState Endowed Chair for the [Technology Center to Promote Healthy Lifestyles](#) at the University of South Carolina's [Arnold School of Public Health](#), has collaborated with students in her department as well as and colleagues at the University of Tennessee and the University of Vermont to examine group-based Internet obesity treatment. They published their findings in [Obesity Science & Practice](#).

With this pilot randomized control trial, Dr. West and her team worked toward enhancing obesity treatment in an online group setting by comparing video and text-based chat. Specifically, they examined feasibility and preliminary efficacy of a video-based platform for delivering weekly chat as part of a six-month, 24-session online group behavioral weight control program compared with the established text-based format, which has produced the best online weight losses to date.

"Internet delivery of behavioral weight control interventions offers potential for broad geographic reach and accessibility," says Dr. West. "But weight losses online fall somewhat short of those produced with the same program delivered in-person and we are looking for ways to improve outcomes of online weight control."

Participants included 32 women with obesity who were randomly assigned to either weekly video group chat sessions or text-based weekly group chat sessions (without video). All women received the same multi-component behavioral intervention focused on establishing new diet and physical activity habits. Those in the video chat group also received a "connected" scale which transmitted their weight recording to the research staff. Those in the text chat group received a digital scale and entered their weight daily into the intervention website. At the end of the 6-month program, the researchers found that women in the video group lost more weight than those in the text-only group.

Although the difference in weight loss between groups was not statistically significant, on average women in the video group lost 5% of their initial weight; the Institute of Medicine has indicated that weight loss of this magnitude produces clinically-meaningful improvements in health. Further, women in the video group demonstrated significantly greater self-monitoring of their weight and their physical activity, and were more likely to engage with the intervention website components.

"Videoconference delivery of group-based online weight control accompanied by a cellular-connected scale may promote greater treatment engagement and weight loss than text-based chat," Dr. West says. "A larger, adequately powered study is warranted to determine which elements drive these enhanced treatment outcomes."