

Motivations for lifestyle change to achieve weight loss: An interpretative phenomenological
analysis

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Abstract

Purpose

Being obese or overweight has negative health implications and is a growing problem in Australia with 62.8% of the Australian population now overweight or obese. The objective of this study was to examine in detail examples of individuals who had achieved healthy lifestyle change, in the form of a 10% weight reduction, and what prompted their efforts to change. By understanding the motivators that trigger successful weight loss in those who have been able to maintain weight loss, more effective health promotion campaigns can be developed to address the obesity epidemic in the broader community.

Methodology

An in-depth qualitative methodology was utilized in order to obtain rich data regarding the motivations to embark on a weight loss journey.

Participants who had lost 10% of their body weight following the implementation of a changes diet and exercise regime were invited to participate via posters placed in the campus of the University of Newcastle, local gyms and community health centres. Six participants were interviewed (3 men and 3 women), ranging in age from 29 to 55 years. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted by the female author, [KR] at the University of Newcastle. Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interviews took place over a six month period in 2013 and ranged in duration from one hour to just under two hours. Interview transcripts were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, 1996).

Results

Five main themes were identified from the research in relation to motivation for lifestyle change for weight loss. These themes were identified as 1) Motivational Kickstart; 2)

Staying on Track; 3) Challenges to Ongoing Motivation; 4) Future Concerns; and 5) The Self and Others.

General Conclusions and Implications

The current study identified that a trigger to action, whether it be internal or external to the participant, as a key motivational factors in prompting behavioural change relating to diet and exercise. Additionally, challenges and facilitators of ongoing motivation to continue new dietary and activity related behaviours are identified by participants. Concerns for possible future selves were identified as motivating sustained behaviour change enabling weight loss. Changing social interactions were identified as both supportive and potentially posing a threat to sustained motivation for weight loss.