

Do Commercial Diet Plans Really Work?

UCSD Researchers Conducting "FAB" Study to Find Out

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The holidays have passed... it's already February... and still, consumers are bombarded with commercials touting the benefits of various commercial diet programs. But which ones really work?

Nutrition experts at the Moores UCSD Cancer Center are seeking overweight women to participate in The FAB (Food, Attitudes and Body) Study, a research study analyzing the effectiveness of one of these commercial diet programs. UCSD is coordinating the multi-center study which will include a total of 440 participants from San Diego, Tucson, Minneapolis, and Portland. The team is looking for motivated women who need to lose weight.

"What we're measuring is whether or not one of these commercial programs is truly effective," said Cheryl Rock, M.D., Ph.D., Moores UCSD Cancer Center. "It's an altruistic effort. We just want to know if it works. Our preliminary study indicates that this could be a useful alternative for consumers and physicians."

Participants must be:

- 18 years or older,
- overweight (BMI between 25 and 40)
- able to participate in physical activity
- willing and able to participate in individualized counseling and attend clinic visits over a two-year period

Background

According to Rock, previous studies have suggested that a commercial weight loss program has the potential to promote a degree of weight loss that is the same or better than traditional counseling or medical interventions. The program that will be studied incorporates several features that have independently been observed to promote weight loss and maintenance, such as individual counseling, low-energy density diet, prepackaged foods, and increased activity. Results have shown improvement in blood lipid levels, heart disease risk and fitness level.

Previous study participants showed an average weight loss of about 8 percent, a loss that was still maintained after one year. But, this approach has never been tested in a major, randomized trial.

"While the weight loss is very important, maintenance is usually the bigger problem," said Bilgé Paik-Camras, assistant clinical professor, family & preventive medicine, Cancer Prevention & Control Program, Moores UCSD Cancer Center. "Many people lose weight only to put it all back on, if not more, months later."

"Obesity is a major concern," added Rock. "We know our healthcare system can't manage the problem alone. There aren't enough counselors, doctors and dietitians to handle this. It would be nice to know some community-based commercial programs are useful and doctors may be able to recommend them with some level of confidence."

For more information, and to determine eligibility, contact the Project Coordinator at: 858-822-6162.

About Moores UCSD Cancer Center

Founded in 1979, the Moores UCSD Cancer Center is one of just 40 centers in the United States to hold a National Cancer Institute (NCI) designation as a Comprehensive Cancer Center. It ranks among the top centers in the nation conducting basic, translational and clinical cancer research, providing advanced patient care and serving the community through innovative outreach and education programs.

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