

Abstract

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Meeting UK dietary recommendations while following a digital weight loss programme: A service evaluation of Slimming World Online member intakes

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While weight loss is the primary focus of weight management programmes, it is important that service users establish healthier eating habits to support overall long-term health and weight loss maintenance. Many dietary plans and weight loss programmes are now available, particularly in the digital landscape, but few offer insights into their users' dietary intakes while following these programmes, and whether they support individuals with meeting dietary recommendations. Slimming World Online, delivered through a website and app, supports members with weight loss through a healthy eating plan, an activity programme, and an online community. This research aims to evaluate the nutrient intakes of members following Slimming World's digital programme, and compare intakes to UK dietary recommendations and current intakes of the general UK population.

Adults who had been members of Slimming World Online for at least 4 weeks were invited to complete a short survey and use a validated online dietary assessment tool, myfood24[®], via an advert on the online member website. Food and drink intake over a 3-day period (2 weekdays and 1 weekend day) was collected and compared against UK dietary recommendations and mean general population intakes, as reported in the National Diet and Nutrition Survey (NDNS)⁽¹⁾.

61 adults (95.1% female; mean age 51.7±10.5 years) who completed the survey and all food diaries were included in the analysis. Mean daily energy intake was 1424.0±457.8kcal. Compared to the UK general population, members were consuming a lower proportion of energy from fat (25.5% vs 34.1%) and saturated fat (8.6% vs 12.3%). Intakes were in line with UK recommendations of <35.0% and <11.0% of total daily energy respectively. Members were consuming a greater proportion of total daily energy from protein than the general population (25.4% vs 17.0%). Mean protein intake was 90.6±32.0g/day, higher than general population intakes of 76.0g/day. Members, on average, were consuming 8.4±4.9 portions of vegetables and fruit/day, with 68.9% meeting the '5 a day' recommendation, compared to 33.0% of the general population. Mean fibre intake was higher than the general population (27.2±12.9g vs 19.7±8.4g/day), while mean salt intake was in line with UK recommendations of <6g/day and lower than the general population (5.3±2.6g vs 8.4±4.1g/day).

In addition to having a reduced energy intake necessary for weight loss, members of Slimming World's digital programme are consuming a diet which meets current UK dietary guidelines and is of better nutritional quality than that of the general UK population. Limitations include potential underreporting of intakes, the small sample size for males and slight differences to the data collection methodology of the NDNS, who use a 4-day food diary. Further research will aim to address these limitations.

References

1. Public Health England (2020). National Diet and Nutrition Survey Rolling programme Years 9 to 11 [Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/ndns-results-from-years-9-to-11-2016-to-2017-and-2018-to-2019>]