

Potential of mobile health apps in facilitating weight loss



Effective weight management is critical for controlling chronic diseases as well as maintaining physical health. Over the last 40 years, obesity has tripled worldwide. Today, 13% of all adults can be classified as obese, and 39% can be considered overweight. We are now at a point where most countries have more people who are overweight or obese rather than underweight.

Obesity is thus a major healthcare concern and is a risk factor for a wide number of diseases, including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and some types of cancer. The link between obesity and chronic conditions is the excessive consumption of energy-dense foods which are high in fat and sugar as well as insufficient physical activity.

Fortunately, both these factors (diet and physical activity levels) are modifiable behaviours that can reduce the incidence of obesity. In recent years, advancement in information technology has resulted in solutions that effectively utilise mobile phones. The use of mobile health technology and mHealth interventions for weight management has increased a great deal. In 2017, there were 325,000 health apps, and among these, the most popular ones were those that allow users to track physical activity and diet or adherence to medication.

mHealth apps present a great opportunity for behaviour change interventions that target weight management. For example, self-monitoring of health-related behaviours such as tracking your dietary intake and physical activity levels), or health-related outcomes such as weight tracking; goal setting, activity reminders, feedback, and peer support can go a long way in helping people lose/maintain their weight.

However, despite the availability of numerous mHealth apps that target weight management, there is very little evidence about their effectiveness. How effective are these apps when it comes to weight management and weight loss?

A systematic literature review was conducted to identify existing evidence with respect to the efficacy of mobile health technology in facilitating weight management behaviours, such as healthy food consumption and increased physical activity. 39 studies were analysed and based on this analysis, mobile health apps were rated on the basis of their technology components, additional treatments, impact on health-related behaviours, and treatment efficacy.

Overall, the findings suggest that mobile health apps are satisfactory, easy to use, and helpful in pursuing weight loss goals. Their potential in facilitating weight loss is primarily driven by their ability to increase treatment adherence through strategies such as self-monitoring. This results in consequent weight loss and maintenance.

Source: [American Journal of Preventive Medicine](#)

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