

What's the Most Cost-Effective Weight Loss Program on the Market?

Weight Watchers is the most cost-effective diet program, according to a new assessment of commercial diet regimens.

The findings by researchers at Duke-National University of Singapore Graduate Medical School also found that the diet drug Qsymia offered the best value for the money in a comparison of weight-loss medications.

The Jenny Craig program generated the greatest weight loss but was the most costly option tested, according to study, published in the June issue of the journal *Obesity*.

"The obesity epidemic has serious health and cost consequences, so employers and third-party payers are beginning to consider how to provide some coverage for commercial weight-loss programs," said researcher Eric Finkelstein, a professor at Duke-NUS and the Duke University Global Health Institute. "These results will help them make better purchasing decisions to maximize the health gains using available resources."

Finkelstein and research assistant Eliza Kruger based their findings on an assessment of high-quality clinical trials of commercially available diet/lifestyle plans and medications with proven weight loss at one year or more.

Three diet/lifestyle programs and three drugs met the criteria for the cost-effectiveness analysis: Weight Watchers, Jenny Craig and VTrim along with the diet pills Qsymia, Lorcaserin and Orlistat.

Several meal-replacement products were excluded despite

showing some success—including Medifast, Optifast and Slimfast—because they did not meet one or more inclusion criteria. Weight-loss surgery also was excluded.

In terms of price, Weight Watchers was found to have an average annual cost of \$377. The expected annual cost for Vtrim users was \$682. Because of the relatively high cost of Jenny Craig food, it was the most expensive option, with an annual cost of more than \$2,500.

Expected annual costs for the diet pills was \$1,743 for Lorcaserin; \$1,518 for Orlistat; and \$1,336 for Qsymia.

Average weight loss at one year ranged from about five pounds for Weight Watchers to 16 pounds for Jenny Craig. Those on Orlistat lost a little more than six pounds. Those on Vtrim and Lorcaserin both lost an average of about seven pounds. Weight loss for those on Qsymia averaged a little less than 15 pounds.

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