To snack or not to snack: results from an eating frequency weight loss study

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Despite 30 years of eating frequency (EF) research, there is limited evidence regarding the utility of EF as a strategy for weight loss.

This study sought to: provide longer-term evidence of the role of EF during a weight loss program on weight, body composition and blood glucose; and determine the impact of EF after removing professional support.

179 (129F, 50M) obese adults were randomly assigned to either 3 meals (3m) (n=59), 3 meals and 3 snacks (3m3s) (n=59) or 6 meals (6m) (n=61) for 6 months on standardised energy reduction diets of 5–7.5MJ (15%P±5%, 30%F±5%, 50%CHO±5%). Weight and body composition were measured at 1, 6, 9 and 12 months.

There were no differences between or within the groups over time for: weight; waist; fat mass; lean body mass and glucose (3m:-2%±2, 3m3s:0%±2, 6m:3%±2) (mean±SE) during the intervention (p>0.05), but glucose trends suggested a positive effect for 6m. When professional support was removed, regains in body composition, waist, and glucose were similar between the groups, however 6m group gained more weight (2%±2) than 3m3s group (F=3.39, p=0.038; post hoc (6m&3m) p=0.014).

Results suggest that little additional utility is gained by altering EF as part of a weight loss regimen. Practitioners can be confident that regimens tailored to individual EF preferences, including snacking, are not disadvantageous.

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