

## Acceptability and feasibility of an acceptance-based guided self-help programme for weight loss maintenance in adults who have previously completed a behavioural weight loss programme: the SWiM feasibility study

### Our research project is over – what did we find?

**Why did we do the project?** Behavioural weight management programmes are effective in reducing weight, but most people regain the weight they lost within 3-5 years. Weight management programmes based on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) show promise for longer term maintenance of weight loss, but they are typically very expensive to deliver. The costs could be reduced by delivering the programmes online and by non-specialist staff, but we are not sure whether this is acceptable to people or whether it is practical to deliver on a larger scale.

**What did we do?** A study was developed to understand whether a programme based on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy delivered digitally by non-specialists (known as 'SWiM' – Supporting Weight Management) could help people to maintain the weight they previously lost, and whether people would find this kind of programme acceptable.

We recruited 61 people who had recently completed a behavioural weight management programme and randomly allocated them to either SWiM or to a control group. The SWiM programme included 14 sessions over 6 months that used Acceptance and Commitment Therapy to support weight loss maintenance; the programme was delivered on a website with telephone support from trained non-specialist coaches. The control group received a leaflet about weight loss maintenance.

At the beginning and end of the programme, all participants completed questionnaires to assess their weight, eating behaviours, and mental wellbeing. Participants also completed questionnaires about their experience of the programme, such as how useful they found the content of the sessions.

We also interviewed people who took part in the study and all of the non-specialist coaches to understand what worked, what did not work, and why. The non-specialist coaches also completed a report form after each participant call to record their experiences of the calls. Interviews of people who withdrew from the SWiM programme helped to further understand what did and did not work. Throughout the project we had input from people with obesity who helped shape this project through their lived experience of managing their weight. This ensured the study is relevant for the people we are trying to help.

**What did we find?** At the end of the SWiM programme, 36 out of 41 participants completed session one, and 25 participants completed all 14 sessions. On average, participants in the SWiM group lost 2.15kg in weight, whilst control participants gained 2.17kg during the 6-month study. SWiM participants reported improvements in their eating behaviour and mental health, whilst the control participants did not. Most participants rated the SWiM programme as easy to use, useful, and enjoyable. It is important to note that this was a small study and, based on these results, we cannot draw any firm conclusions. We will need to do a larger study to help us decide if the SWiM programme is effective or not.

In interviews, participants who did the SWiM programme reported learning new skills and reinforcing existing skills and strategies which supported them to manage their weight. They found the SWiM website was easy to use, but some participants experienced problems accessing the website from mobile devices.

**What's the take-home message?** Overall, the findings suggest that the SWiM programme is acceptable and may support people to maintain their weight loss. We are making changes to the programme based on our learnings, and plan to conduct a larger study to see if the programme is cost-effective (i.e., good value for money) to deliver at scale.