



Whew! Study Says Yo-Yo Dieters Are Not Headed to Early Graves

A study co-led by the Indiana University School of Public Health made news this fall and caught my eye, though I was surprised the media didn't point out its significance a little more frankly. I say this because it seems this study turns a lot of other research, not to mention conventional wisdom, upside down.

Published in the November 2018 issue of the journal *Obesity* (obesityjournal.org), "Weight Cycling Increases Longevity Compared with Sustained Obesity in Mice" found just what its title states. This contradicts everything I thought I knew about losing and regaining excess pounds. Previous studies have concluded that yo-yo dieting is detrimental to health, leading to heart disease, fatty liver disease, diabetes, and, yes, premature death.

However, this study found that mice who repeatedly lost and regained weight lived significantly longer than mice who simply stayed obese, and they had a similar lifespan to mice who lost weight and kept it off. In fact, sometimes the yo-yo dieting mice had *longer* lifespans than their counterparts who lost weight and remained at a normal weight.

In the study, conducted in partnership with the University of Alabama at Birmingham and Columbia University, mice were divided into four groups. All of the mice were fattened up and became obese. The first group remained so. The second group was put on a calorie restricted (CR) diet and returned to a normal weight. The third group went on a CR diet and lowered their weight to somewhere between a normal weight and their obese weight (maybe we would call them simply

"overweight"). The fourth group of mice were placed on a CR diet, returned to a normal weight, then cycled again between obesity and normal weight two or three more times.

The researchers found that weight cycling "significantly increased life span relative to remaining with obesity and had a similar benefit to sustained modest weight loss." That's very good news for yo-yo dieters.

Which isn't to say that losing weight only to regain it is a good idea. There are plenty of risks associated with obesity—type 2 diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, stroke, and metabolic syndrome among them. But there are many people who lose weight only to regain all or some of it, over and over again. Hopefully this research will lead to studies with human subjects that shed light on even more positive outcomes for those of us who, for whatever reason, struggle to maintain a healthy weight over the course of a lifetime.

There is something else this study did for me. It reminded me to relax a bit and stop worrying about perfection. The idea that perfect is the enemy of good has been around forever and attributed (correctly) to Voltaire, Confucius, and Shakespeare, among others. But I like Gretchen Rubin's (*The Happiness Project*, HarperCollins, 2018) way of putting it best. It's longer, but funnier: "Instead of pushing yourself to an impossible 'perfect,' and therefore getting nowhere, accept 'good.' Many things worth doing are worth doing badly." And now, science says, losing weight is one of them.

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