

Weight Watchers



What it's about

With a 40+year history, Weight Watchers programs teach and encourage their clients to take note of portion sizes and calories. Instead of offering a rigid diet plan of foods to eat or not eat, this diet aims to help people make healthy eating decisions and to be more physically active. Motivation and support for these changes are offered through group meetings.

The cautions

As with any diet, there are some red flags to watch for. It's a bad sign if the diet promises a quick fix, advises avoidance of a particular food group, or is based only on a single scientific study. Commercial weight loss programs have not been studied in any great detail.

In the January 2005 issue of the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, researchers at the University of Pennsylvania took on the challenge of evaluating various commercial weight loss programs. The researchers combed the scientific literature for studies that lasted more than 12 weeks and that included at least 10 participants. Few studies actually met these criteria. Among the various types of commercial diets, Weight Watchers had the strongest studies to support its effectiveness. The best study found that Weight Watchers dieters lost about 10 lbs in 6 months, and were able to keep off about 5 lbs after 2 years.

The bottom line

This commercial weight loss program is considered one of the best in its class. In their review, the University of Pennsylvania researchers found very few or no published high-quality studies of other commercial diets like Jenny Craig, eDiets.com, TOPS or Overeaters Anonymous.