Using Facebook to Deliver a Behavioral Weight Loss Intervention for Low-Income Postpartum Women

Overview
Women who live below poverty, especially women from racial and ethnic minority groups, face higher rates of obesity. Gaining excess weight during pregnancy and then retaining this weight post-partum can place these women at risk for obesity. Weight loss studies with postpartum women have had limited impact. These studies have struggled with low attendance rates due to childcare, transportation, and scheduling needs. There is a need to develop effective post-partum programs that can be delivered in resource constrained settings where diverse low-income women seek care. This study pilot-tested a Facebook-delivered post-partum weight loss intervention for diverse low-income mothers.

Main Questions
• Engagement: Do women participate?
• Retention: Do women complete the program?
• Weight loss: Do women lose weight?
• Satisfaction: Would women recommend it to a friend?

Study
In collaboration with the Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) program in Worcester, Massachusetts, we implemented 3 pilot studies. The study adapted information from an existing intervention called Fresh Start. The team turned Fresh Start content into daily Facebook posts for weight loss, using text, photos, infographics and videos to provide women with knowledge, skills, and support. Feedback from participants was used to improve the Facebook posts over the 3 pilots. The intervention included an intensive 8-week phase with two posts per day and group interaction facilitated by a coach. An 8-week maintenance phase followed, with one post per day and no coach. The Institutional Review Board at the UMass Medical School approved the study.

The Bottom Line
Most participants participated in and completed the study, and would recommend the program to a friend. Over half of them lost weight. The intervention was acceptable to participants and could be feasibly delivered to diverse, low-income women.

Source

Contact
Milagros C. Rosal, PhD| Division of Preventive and Behavioral Medicine | University of Massachusetts Medical School
E-mail: Milagros.Rosal@umassmed.edu

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Call for Action
Social media can be an effective way to involve new mothers from socio-economically disadvantaged groups in behavioral interventions for weight loss.