

THE EFFECT OF DURATION BETWEEN VISITS ON
WEIGHT LOSS AND ATTRITION

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The general unsuccessfulness of many weight loss programs is well acknowledged. This study investigated whether the time interval between appointments was an important factor for success.

Participants in the study were healthy premenopausal women who wanted to lose 20 Kg weight or more but who did not weigh more than 100 Kg. They were obtained by advertisement in the daily newspaper and randomly divided into two groups, A and B. A deposit of \$50, refunded at the termination of the study ensured that appointments were kept. Basically the same diet plan was given to all with minor variations to account for differences in energy needs and lifestyles. Counselling by a dietitian occurred at each subsequent visit.

Group A came weekly for five visits (V₁) then fortnightly for five visits (V₂). Group B commenced by coming fortnightly for five visits (V₁) and finishing with five weekly visits (V₂).

	Group A	Group B
Number of participants	28	22
Number of drop-outs	2	8
V ₁ weight loss (Kg/visit)	0.85 ± 0.4 [†]	0.41 ± 0.26 [‡]
V ₂ weight loss (Kg/visit)	0.30 ± 0.27 [‡]	0.34 ± 0.26 [†]
[†] Weight loss/week		[‡] Weight loss/fortnight

Weight loss of Group A visiting weekly was significantly different from fortnightly visits ($p < .005$) and significantly different from B group weekly visits ($p < .025$). It appears that initial success is important in reinforcing the momentum of weight loss. When this does not occur (Group B) later weekly visits do not overcome the inertia and the weight loss during fortnightly visits is not significantly different from weekly visits. But rate of weight loss per week at weekly visits is significantly different from that occurring per week when visits are fortnightly ($p < .001$). That is, participants lost weight per visit, rather than per week. So that when visits are weekly rather than fortnightly the rate of weight loss over a given time is greater. Participants comments were that they preferred weekly visits, they felt more motivated and the visits reinforced their behaviour change.

Attrition occurred during fortnightly visits for both groups. Reasons for leaving program included illness of self or family members (3), taking up of employment and therefore unable to keep daytime appointments (2), rate of weight loss did not live up to expectations (1), did not like changing to fortnightly appointments even though the study design had been previously explained (1).

The results are of significance to dietitians who often do not have the resources for weekly appointments. This study shows that appointment intervals should form an integral part of diet management strategy planning.