

LIGHTEN UP - A COMMUNITY APPROACH TO WEIGHT CONTROL

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Lighten Up is a community weight loss program developed by Dalby-Wambo HEALTH 2000 for the Dalby community in response to findings highlighting the problem of overweight and obesity. A 1989 risk factor prevalence study found the prevalence of overweight and obesity (BMI > 25 for males and > 24 for females) in Dalby (55% of males, 51% of females) was substantially higher than that observed nationally (43% of males, 35% of females) (National Heart Foundation 1985).

Lighten Up was an eight week program which commenced in October 1990. Follow-up of participants took place three months (March 1991) and six months (July 1991) post-program. The main aims of Lighten Up were to assist participants who were more than 10% overweight to: 1) reduce their weight closer to or within the healthy weight range and 2) maintain or further reduce their weight for six months post-program.

Lighten Up put equal emphasis on three aspects of weight control: eating habits; activity levels; and behaviour change strategies. The program consisted of a competition and general promotion and educational components for those not eligible for the competition and/or those not attracted to a competitive format. The Lighten Up competition targeted the general community, worksites and service clubs to recruit participants into a competition format. Scheduled screenings were at the beginning of the program, mid-program and on program completion. Incentives were in the form of donated prizes for those who achieved weight loss goals. All participants received a Lighten Up kit and were able to attend six different lifestyle workshops.

Total enrolment in the competition was 163, with a representation of 61 males (37%) and 102 females (63%). An additional 57 people (non-competitors) from Dalby collected kits. The mean age of participants was 41.7 ± 11.39 years. The mean BMI of participants was 32.5 ± 4.44 .

Between the 138 people (86% overall response rate, with males response rate 100% and females response rate 80%) who competed in the Lighten Up competition; a total of 485 kg was lost over the eight weeks. The total average weight loss was 3.5 kg, with average for males 4.1 kg and average for females 3.1 kg. Thirty-three percent and 24% of participants lost further weight, while 45% and 32% of participants maintained some of their weight loss at the three month and six month follow-up, respectively.

Feedback about the Lighten Up program has been very favourable and a repeat of the program in Dalby is planned, in an attempt to reduce the prevalence of overweight and obesity.

NATIONAL HEART FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA (1985). Risk factor prevalence study.
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