The challenges of weight loss for obese older adults

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Older adults worldwide are becoming obese at an alarming rate. More than 35% of U.S. men and women were obese in 2009–2010. There was no significant difference in prevalence between men and women at any age. The World Health Organization reports that worldwide over 200 million men and nearly 300 million women were obese in 2011. The purpose of this research is to understand the challenges older adults face when trying to lose weight. A focus group with older adults who have struggled with trying to lose weight revealed that these older adults are frustrated by their lack of sustainable success in weight loss. They felt that lack of knowledge is not the problem. They all understood that weight loss involves the balance of nutrition and exercise but found weight loss difficult, with weight lost quickly regained. Difficulties cited were living alone and not wanting to cook for one, the expense and short shelf life of fresh fruits and vegetables, medications, eating out of habit, fast food, lack of motivation, eating for comfort, and more difficulty exercising. More research is needed on the difficulty of losing weight among older adults who are basically healthy but want to lose weight before the advent of serious health consequences such as diabetes or reduced mobility. A greater understanding of what strategies can be successfully implemented could also contribute to reduced health care costs by preventing diseases which are costly in terms of health care dollars as well as quality of life.

Biography

Bonnie Callen has been a registered nurse for over 40 years. She received a PhD in Nursing from the University of Wisconsin – Madison. Currently she is an Associate Professor at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, teaching research, cultures and community health nursing. Her research has been in the area of nutrition in older adults, recently focusing on obesity in this population. She has published 18 data based article and three book chapters. She is currently working on a grant from Oak Ridge National Laboratories (ORNL) looking at health characteristics of their workforce.

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