

Weight Watchers: An Effective Weight Loss Program

Liz Ziner

Beloit College, Beloit, WI

Abstract

My hypotheses about Weight Watchers™ are that their diet program is effective for weight loss and it encourages overall health. To do this, I examined medical studies, consumer reports and articles. The results I found were uniform and with the exception of one study, all data concluded that Weight Watchers™, when followed precisely, does lead to weight loss. Although the range of data spanned from minimal to very significant weight loss, nearly all of the participants did lose some weight. My hypothesis was proven correct. Weight Watchers™ emphasizes the importance of a healthy lifestyle and not just a healthy diet, so the program can be effective. The emphasis on physical activity, support groups, individual coaching, POINTS™ values for foods, portion control and a well-rounded weight loss plan is fundamental to Weight Watchers™, and the success of Weight Watchers™ clientele can be attributed to this.

Introduction

Today's society is obsessed with body image. The market for diet programs and products in the United States has grown from \$6.3 billion in 1985 to \$9.6 billion in 2005 (4). And with 44,639 products and books about weight loss available on Amazon.com(8), finding an effective program will require much research. One of the most popular programs is Weight Watchers™ (9). The combination of a "POINTS™ system" for food regulation and tracking, group meetings, individual coaching and weigh-ins is seemingly geared toward people who may not have the will power or independence to go it alone.

I hypothesize that when followed precisely, Weight Watchers™ will not only be effective in terms of weight loss, but also in improving overall health. The tendency by most people to overeat may be due to excessively large portion sizes (8), therefore the portion regulation aspect of the Weight Watchers™ program will prove to play an integral part in weight loss. Also, due to the guidelines that encourage the consumption of a wide variety of foods, it is likely that people on Weight Watchers™ will consume more essential vitamins and minerals than they would have otherwise, thus leading to better overall health. In this study I investigate if Weight Watchers™ is in fact a safe and effective weight loss program and what additional health benefits may come from following this plan.

Method

In this study, I analyzed findings from clinical trials and peer-reviewed studies to determine if Weight Watchers™ is an effective weight loss program. I explored the nutritional statements of the program and determined if the diet is well-rounded, both with food variety and nutritional value, and encourages the consumption of vitamins, minerals, and other essential nutrients to promote good health and not just weight loss. I gained a basic understanding of nutritional guidelines by studying the Willett Food Pyramid. I avoided using any source that was sponsored by Weight Watchers™ or any other diet company or website to avoid all advertising. My primary information came from the Journal of the American Medical Association, the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, and the Journal of the American Dietetic Association.

Results

According to the latest joint American Heart Association/American College of Sports Medicine guidelines on physical activity, healthy adults ages 18–65 should get at least 30 minutes of moderately intense physical activity at least five days a week (2). Weight Watchers™ encourages those guidelines as well. The diet and exercise can effectively change someone's lifestyle in a heart-healthy way. Since Weight Watchers™ places a POINTS™ value on exercise (9), it is beneficial in many ways for the participants to comply with the American Heart Association/ Weight Watchers™ guidelines. Graph 1 demonstrates the weight loss of active adults, both those who participated in some form of dieting and those who did not. Graph 2 demonstrates the popularity of the various diets' websites and Weight Watchers™ has always been at least marginally more popular. Table 3 contains several statistics about the success of Weight Watchers™ and the benefits derived from following the program.

Figure 1. Causes of Weight Loss Among Active Adults (3)

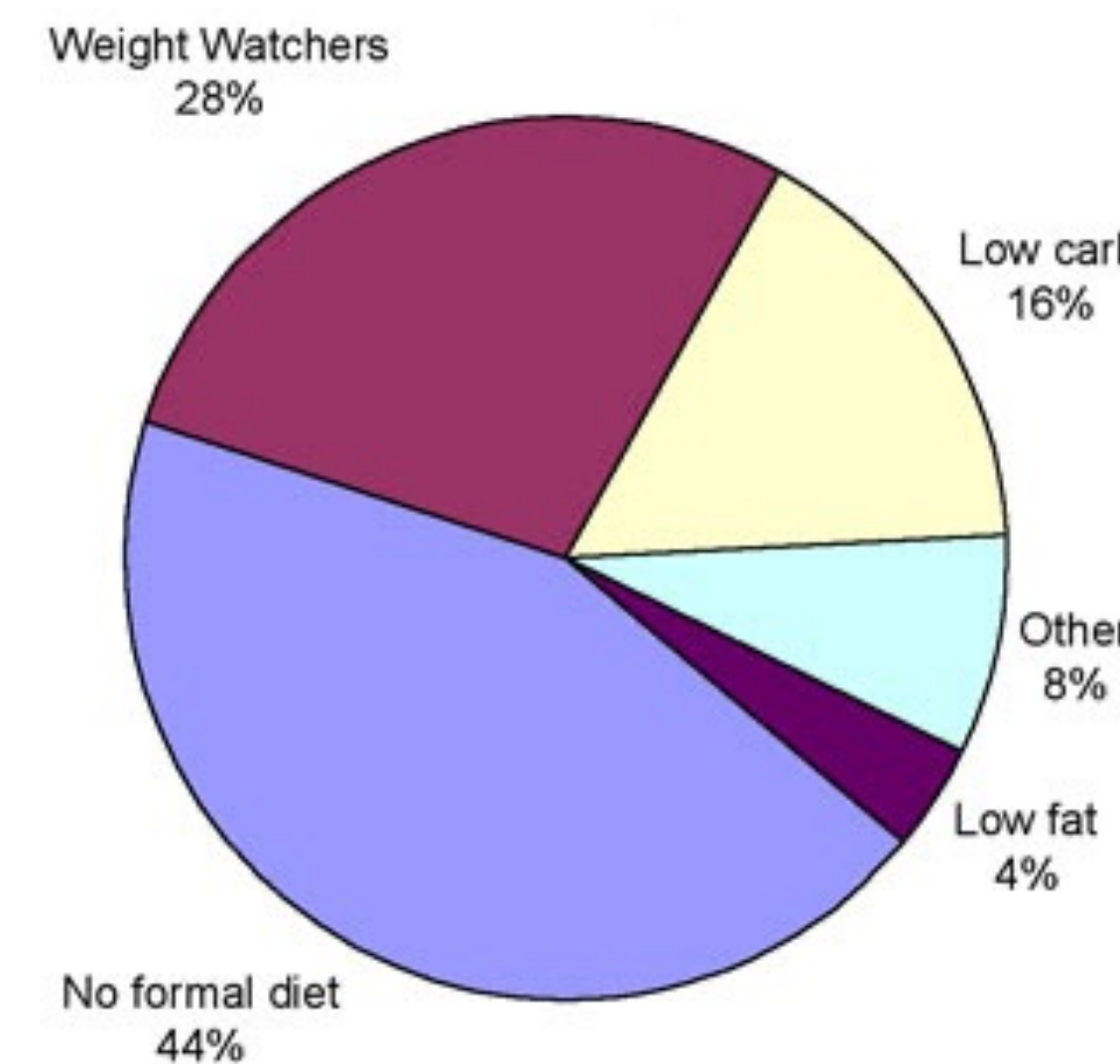


Figure 2. Success of Diet Plan Web Sites (3)

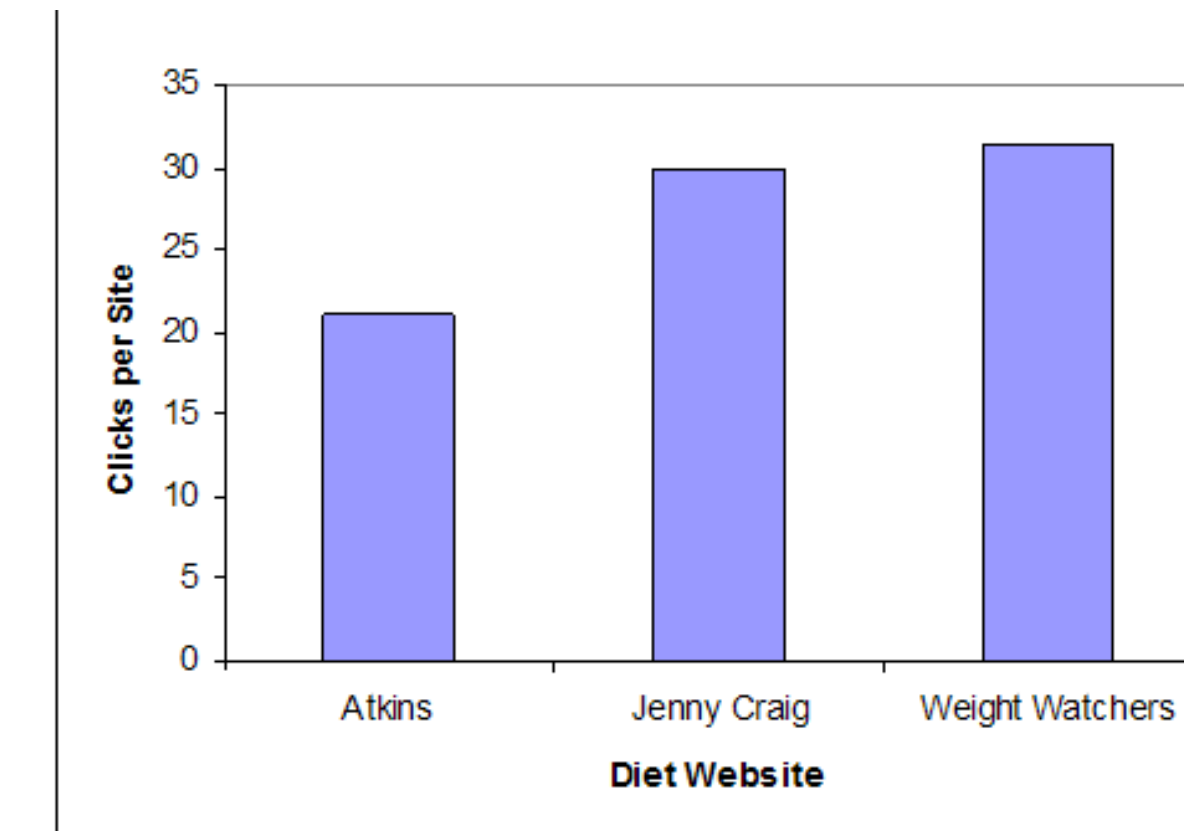


Figure 3. Weight Watchers Statistical Data (9)

- *After 12 weeks, 98% of participants had lost at least 1%, and 53% had lost 5% or more of their body weight.
- *After 12 weeks, there was already noticeable benefits for the heart, thus decreasing the risk of heart disease and other heart-related problems.
- *After 12 weeks, participants had lower cholesterol, blood pressure and insulin levels.
- *Post- Weight Watchers™, the average participant gains back between 30-50% of the weight they lost in the first 6 months.
- *78% of Weight Watchers™ members become lifetime members.
- *Research shows that people who go to Weight Watchers™ meetings are much more likely to lose weight than people who try to lose weight on their own.

Figure 4. Diet Popularity/Success 2004-2006 (3)

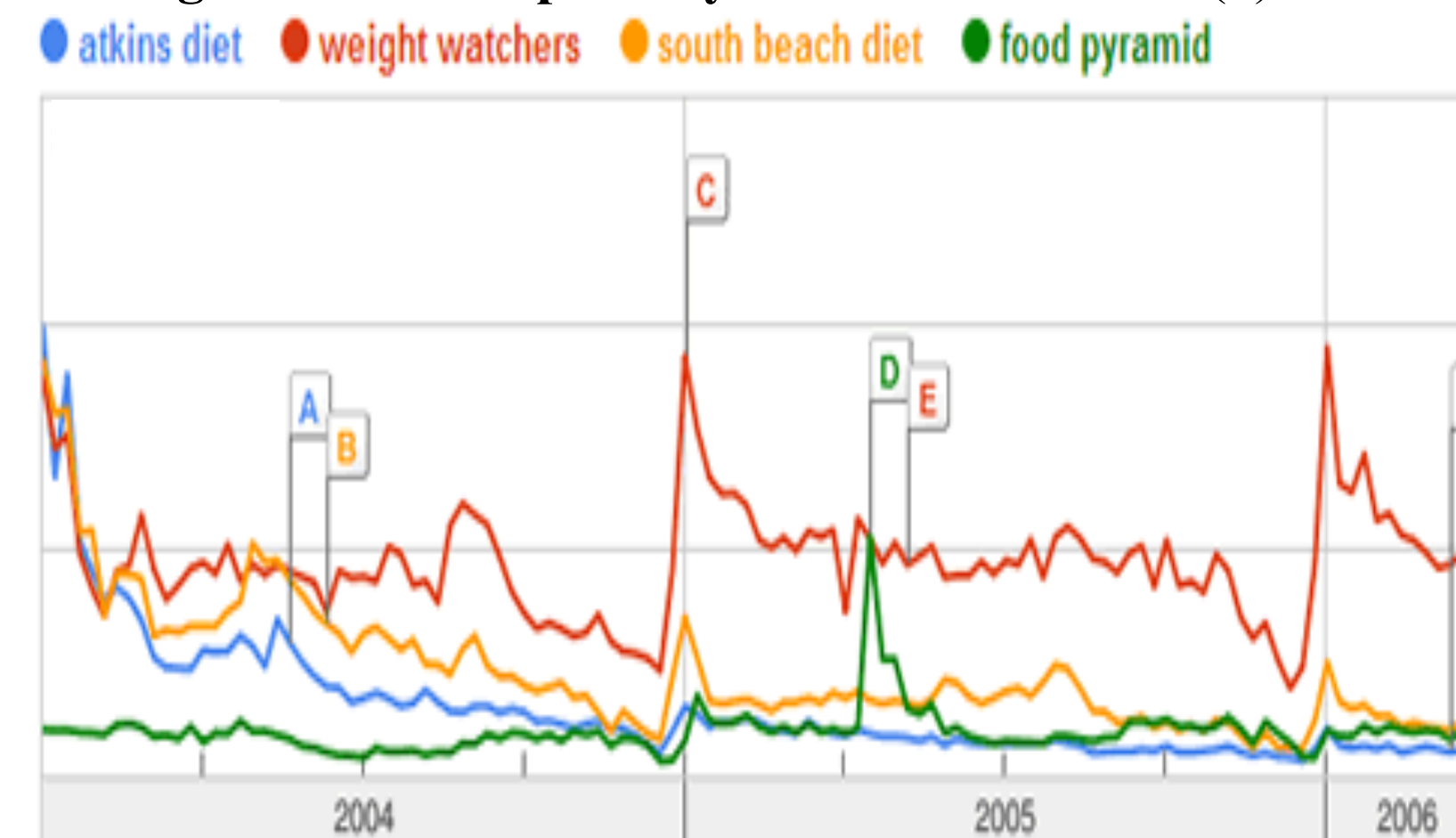
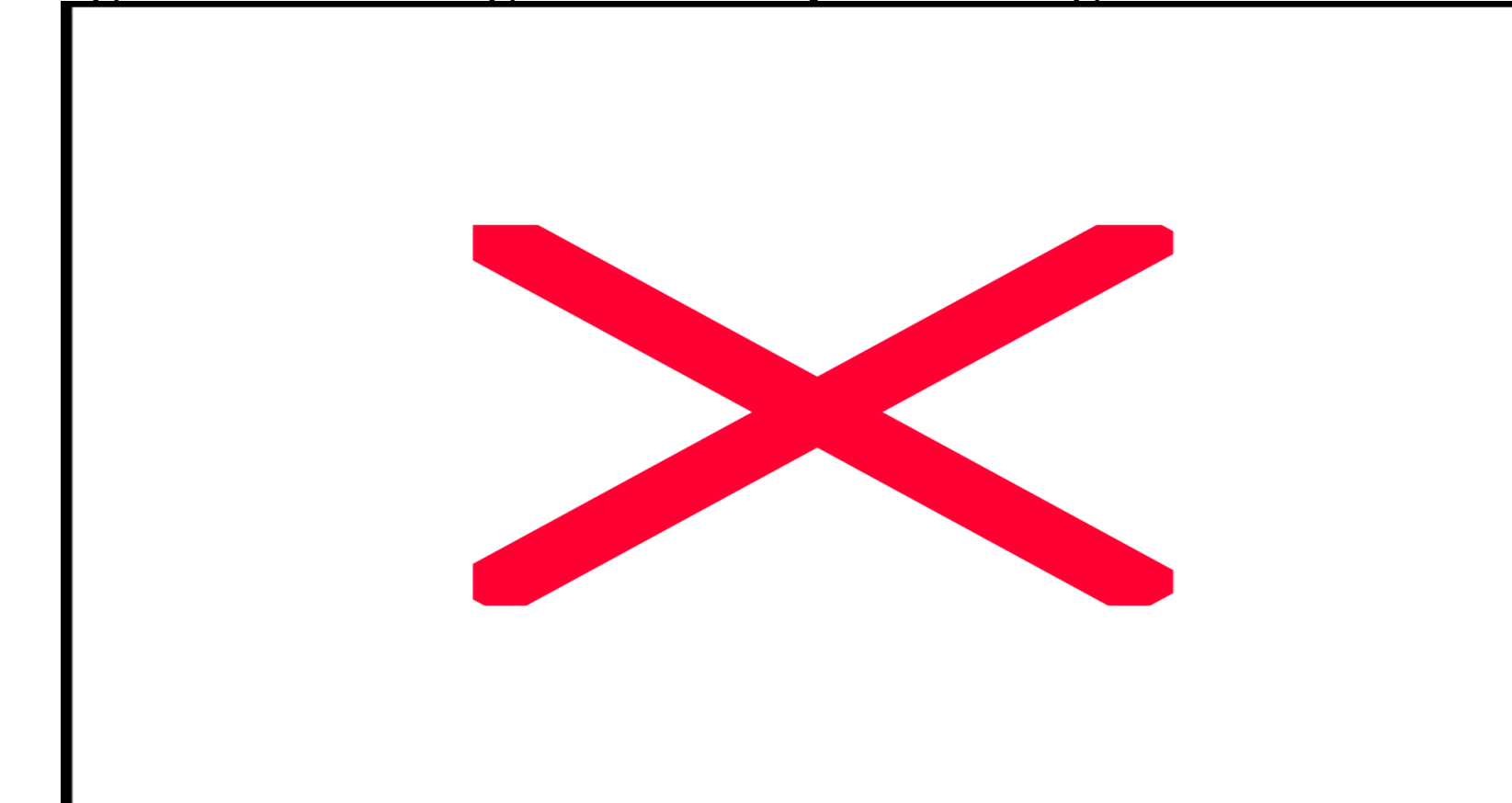


Figure 5. One Program Participant's Weight Loss over 77 weeks (6)



Results (continued)

Figure 4 shows the success of Weight Watchers™ compared to the Atkins, South Beach, and Food Pyramid Diets. Once again, Weight Watchers™ has proven to be the most effective through the years. Figure 5 illustrates one Weight Watchers™ participant's weight loss journey, and gives a "real-life" example of the data in action. Throughout all of the research, the consistency lies in the popularity and effectiveness of the Weight Watchers™ program.

Discussion

After intense research and analysis, I have determined that nearly all participants who demonstrated strict dietary adherence to the guidelines of the Weight Watchers™ program lost weight. There was only one study that said the diet did not work, but there were many studies that proved Weight Watchers™ effective. Although the short-term weight loss was not as rapid or dramatic as other commercial diets, Weight Watchers participants tended to keep more of the weight off for longer after discontinuing the program than dieters in other programs. Weight Watchers™ also improved overall health by lowering cholesterol, blood pressure and insulin levels. The flexibility of the POINTS™ system combined with the group sessions and exercise made participants "feel healthier" regardless of the weight loss. Despite the slightly longer weight loss process, Weight Watchers™ will eventually lead to weight loss in nearly all cases. The healthy lifestyle taught by Weight Watchers™ does not necessarily end when the participant discontinues the program. Instead, the positive lifestyle changes are likely to stay with a participant long into the future.

RESOURCES

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