

# impact

of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences



## Healthy, Well-Nourished Population “Healthy Weight 4Life”

### Issue

Overweight and obesity affect more than 50 percent of the U.S. population, according to recent figures from the Centers for Disease Control. There is a critical need for effective weight management programs that integrate all the factors that contribute to obesity. A university environment can facilitate multi-disciplinary, collaborative approaches combining research and community outreach. At the University of Arizona, researchers in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, and the College of Medicine, are working together to develop and test a sound, scientifically-based weight loss program.

### What has been done?

Faculty from the Department of Nutritional Sciences in the UA College of Agriculture and Life Sciences and the Department of Physiology in the UA College of Medicine developed a comprehensive weight loss program called “Healthy Weight 4 Life.” One hundred fifty women enrolled in 2001. Phase One includes a weight loss curriculum emphasizing four elements: increased physical activity, healthy eating, developing healthy

interpersonal relationships, and dealing with psychological and emotional barriers to weight loss. Phase Two features 18 months of subsequent online support that offers encouragement for participants in maintaining their weight loss. The Web-based format is more cost-effective than weekly face-to-face follow-up meetings. The UA researchers are testing this method for its efficacy and usefulness in promoting and maintaining long-term weight loss.

### Impact

Of the 150 women who began the program in 2000, the average weight loss during the first 16 weeks was 11 pounds. Some women lost more than 40 pounds. More than 75 percent of the women enrolled in Phase Two, the online support phase, have maintained their weight or continued to lose more weight over the first 12-18 months of follow-up. Some of the women in the program bordered on class II obesity when they started. Over the past year, the program has been successfully translated into a broader community program in Tucson, with an advisory

board of former research participants helping to coordinate and administrate the effort.

“I lost 44 pounds and now I am able to wear clothes I haven’t worn in years. How is this program different from others I have tried? It has all the elements to succeed. The nutrition, the hydration, the physical activity, mind and body, and the support groups. My physical activity grew from none to 500 to 600 minutes of activity a week or sometimes more. Thanks to this program, I started the New Year with a size 8, [down] from a size 16 or sometimes 18. Believe me, I do not miss my previous size.”

—participant

“The program was a lot of things to me...fun, new friends, professional people to learn from, informational in terms of exercise and nutrition, but most of all it took me from feelings of isolation, despair and depression over my weight and physical health to feelings that I am not alone with my struggles and I can control my weight and to some extent my physical health.”

—participant

### Funding

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