

Can a VLCD be a realistic alternative to bariatric surgery for the super-morbidly obese? A retrospective study of 650 patients with BMI \geq 50 participating in the LighterLife Total VLCD for 12 weeks in 2009

Hallam CL, Mullins G, Wiggins J, du Plessis J, Cox JSA, Hewlett B.

LighterLife UK Limited, Cavendish House, Parkway, Harlow Business Park, Harlow, Essex CM19 5QF, UK



Average weight loss for 650 patients with BMI \geq 50 was 23.5kg (3st 10lb) in 12 weeks

Introduction

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) is an independent organisation evaluating the efficacy of health treatment in England and Wales. It recommends bariatric surgery as the first-line treatment for patients with a BMI \geq 50 in whom surgical intervention is appropriate. The rationale is that this patient group is in most urgent need of rapid weight reduction, yet has difficulties in achieving this by pharmacological agents or calorie-deficit diets.

Compliance is key in the effectiveness of non-surgical interventions. Achieving compliance in those with dysfunctional eating behaviour is highly challenging. However, it is not impossible, and very-low-calorie diets (VLCDs) may represent a manageable alternative.

LighterLife Total is a commercial weight-management programme for patients with BMI \geq 30.

Weight loss is achieved with a nutritionally complete VLCD, alongside a behavioural-modification programme for weight management, using transactional analysis and cognitive behavioural therapy techniques (TCBT) in small, single-sex, weekly groups.

The abstinence from conventional food, coupled with the group work, helps patients to create a reflective space in which they can explore the reasons for their overeating and develop new practical and psychological strategies for successful weight management in the future.

To support this, following weight loss, an ongoing weight-maintenance programme helps patients reintroduce a full range of conventional food and continue to implement healthy lifestyle changes to increase the likelihood of weight management, thus reducing the risk of associated co-morbidities.

Aim

To determine if patients with BMI \geq 50 can comply with the LighterLife Total VLCD. This study reports on a sample of 650 BMI \geq 50 patients participating in the LighterLife Total VLCD from January to August 2009.

Method

Following medical screening for suitability, patients commenced the LighterLife Total VLCD and participated in weekly group TCBT sessions to encourage behavioural change. Patient compliance with the VLCD was measured by attendance at the group sessions, ongoing purchase of VLCD and weekly weight measurements. The ongoing presence of ketosis was confirmed using urinary Ketostix.

The VLCD supplied complete nutrition during weight loss and reduced the distractions of choice around food, providing the clarity of explicit boundaries.

LighterLife Total VLCD	Amount per day
Energy	550 kcal (mean)
Protein	\geq 50g
Carbohydrate	\geq 50g
Fats	15.9g (mean)
Vitamins and minerals	\geq 100% (RDA)

Results

Of the 650 patients commencing the LighterLife Total VLCD, 88.5% were participating at 4 weeks, 80.2% at 8 weeks and 66.5% at 12 weeks. This is in contrast to expected attrition rates of between 30-60% from dietary intervention (Dansinger et al, 2005). Mean weight loss was also significant: 10.7kg (1st 10lb) at 4 weeks, 17.7kg (2st 11lb) at 8 weeks and 23.5kg (3st 10lb) at 12 weeks.

Time on VLCD	Participation rate (% of starters)	Mean weight loss
4 weeks	88.5%	10.7kg (1st 10lb)
8 weeks	80.2%	17.7kg (2st 11lb)
12 weeks	66.5%	23.5kg (3st 10lb)

Conclusion

- The level of engagement with the LighterLife Total VLCD is high in patients with BMI \geq 50, with significant weight loss and compliance.
- The support and behavioural modification facilitated in the weekly groups may be factors in maintaining compliance.
- The LighterLife Total VLCD can replace surgical management of obesity with identical results, without morbidity and at a lower cost.

Key words: super-morbidly obese, compliance, significant weight loss, very-low-calorie diet (VLCD), behavioural modification, LighterLife

References: Dansinger ML, Gleason JA, Griffith JL, Selker HP, Schaefer EJ. Comparison of the Atkins, Ornish, Weight Watchers, and Zone diets for weight loss and heart disease risk reduction: a randomized trial. JAMA. 2005; 293: 43-53.



Featured client lost 71.2kg (11st 3lb) in 7 months