

Abstract

# Weight Management Challenges and Facilitators in Adult Maltese Women <sup>†</sup>

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<sup>†</sup> Presented at the 14th European Nutrition Conference FENS 2023, Belgrade, Serbia, 14–17 November 2023.

**Abstract:** Obesity and overweight rates in Malta are high. Recent studies report that nearly one third of Maltese women are affected by obesity and another third are in the overweight category, respectively the causes of obesity are complex and multifactorial, highlighting the need to further understand the main issues within a specific target population to develop effective and sustainable weight loss strategies. The overall aims of this local study were to investigate the main weight management challenges and facilitators experienced by Maltese women. An adapted, translated, and anonymised quantitative survey targeting adult Maltese females aged 18–65 years was shared in local media from November till December 2020. The questionnaire addressed weight loss (WL) strategies utilised; WL influences; barriers to WL (using close-ended questions); and suggestions for weight loss programmes (WLP) (using open-ended questions). Results were analysed using SPSS software (IBM, version 27). Data analysis included Chi-squared, Friedman and Kruskal-Wallis tests. Results: 193 respondents returned the survey. The majority (n = 93, 48.2%) were aged between 18–29 years; over half had a tertiary education level (n = 112, 58%), and they had a median Body Mass Index (BMI) of 25.3 kg/m<sup>2</sup>. The three most commonly reported weight loss methods were ‘calorie controlled’ (n = 129, 66.8%), ‘fasting’ (n = 61, 31.6%), and the ‘Mediterranean diet (based on local dietary guidelines)’ (n = 51, 26.4%). Respondents thought that ‘drinking more water’; ‘consuming smaller food portions’; and ‘removing sugary products’ helped WL, whereas ‘being abroad’ or being ‘sad or stressed’ did not (mean rating scores [MRS]: 4.19, 4.13, 4.11, 3.97, 3.90, respectively). The main barriers to exercise were ‘lack of motivation’; and ‘finding it difficult to stick with routine’ (MRS: 3.24 and 3.16). Suggestions for WL included receiving more educational information (n = 20, 31.2%), making WL/exercise programmes affordable (n = 14, 21.9%), and receiving more support (n = 7, 10.9%). This local study pinpoints issues such as cost, motivation, and mental wellbeing considerations. The development of frameworks for further guidance and support on sustainable and healthy weight loss is suggested.

**Keywords:** weight management; Malta



**Citation:** Zammit, N.; Copperstone, C. Weight Management Challenges and Facilitators in Adult Maltese Women. *Proceedings* **2023**, *91*, 252. <https://doi.org/10.3390/proceedings2023091252>

Academic Editors: Sladjana Sobajic and Philip Calder

Published: 4 February 2024



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**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, C.C.; methodology, C.C. and N.Z.; data curation; N.Z.; formal analysis, N.Z.; writing-original draft preparation, N.Z.; writing-review and editing, C.C.; All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Ethical approval from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) (Faculty of Health Sciences) of the University of Malta (UM) was obtained. Approval was granted on 30 June 2020 (unique form ID: 5856\_30062020).

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

**Data Availability Statement:** The data presented in this study are available in Open Access Repository University of Malta (OAR@UM) at <https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/handle/123456789/86336> (accessed on 14 November 2023).

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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