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Weight loss—there is an app for that! But does it adhere to evidence-informed practices?

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Abstract

Little is known about how much smartphone apps for weight control adhere to evidence-informed practices. The aim of this study was to review and summarize the content of available weight control apps. Information on content, user rating, and price was extracted from iTunes on September 25, 2009. Apps ($n = 204$) were coded for adherence to 13 evidence-informed practices for weight control. Latent class analysis was used to identify subgroups of apps based on endorsement practices. Only a small percentage of apps had five or more of the 13 practices (15%). Latent class analysis revealed three main types of apps: diet, physical activity, and weight journals (19%); dietary advice and journals (34%); and weight trackers (46%). User ratings were not associated with apps from these three classes. Many apps have insufficient evidence-informed content. Research is needed that seeks to develop, improve, and evaluate these apps.

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