

# Diet, Exercise, or Both in Obese Older Adults

*Combining dieting and exercise improved physical performance — but so did dieting or exercise alone.*

Because obesity predisposes older adults to disability, we often advise such patients to diet and get exercise. To determine the relative contributions of these two interventions, researchers randomized 107 obese older adults (age,  $\geq 65$ ; body-mass index,  $>30$  kg/m<sup>2</sup>) with mild-to-moderate frailty to receive a diet intervention, exercise intervention, both, or neither. The diet intervention consisted of individualized weight-loss diets targeted to 10% reduction of baseline weight and weekly group sessions with dietitians. The exercise intervention consisted of 90-minute, thrice-weekly group sessions that included aerobic exercise and resistance training.

At 1 year, mean weight loss was about 9 kg in both the diet-only and diet–exercise groups but was negligible in the exercise-only and control groups. Mean improvement on a 9-task, 36-point physical performance test (the primary outcome) was best in the diet–exercise group (5.4 points), intermediate in the exercise-only and diet-only groups (4.0 and 3.1 points, respectively), and negligible in the control group.

**Comment:** Unsurprisingly, a combination of dieting plus exercise improved physical performance more than dieting or exercise alone. However, the exercise-only intervention improved physical performance nearly as much as the combined intervention; that's an important message to convey to older patients who successfully engage in exercise but are frustrated by inability to lose weight. The interventions in this study were labor-intensive (from the healthcare system's perspective) and required substantial commitment (from the patient's perspective).

— [Allan S. Brett, MD](#)

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