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Keep the pressure on

A Kaiser study aims to determine if self-acupressure can help keemaintain weight loss

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KATY MULDOON

The Oregonian Staff

FACTBOX

- Study needs volunteers

You've lost weight. Now, how to keep it off?

Imagine if the answer was as simple as routinely cupping one hand behind your skull, touching a few fingers to your face and thinking positive thoughts about your health?

Doctors at Kaiser Permanente's Center for Health Research in Portland are intrigued enough by results of a small pilot study that they'll explore further whether combining self-acupressure and mental imagery can help patients keep off weight. A \$2.1 million grant from the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine will help.

Kaiser is recruiting 500 overweight members of its health plan for the study. Patients will take part in a weight-loss program. Those who lose at least 10 pounds will qualify for the study's second phase, in which participants will be randomly split into two clusters: One will spend six months in a social support group; the other will learn and practice the Tapas Acupressure Technique.

The technique, known as TAT, showed superior results to the support group in Kaiser's pilot study.

"It has the potential," Dr. Charles Elder, chief investigator, said Tuesday, "to be a groundbreaking project if the results from the pilot pan out in the larger trial."

Elder speculated that TAT works psychologically, helping people conquer fears and obsessions, which often go hand-in-hand with weight troubles.

Because it's easy to learn, is inexpensive and can be done anywhere, if the study proves TAT works, Elder said, it easily could be used to help patients keep their weight down.

Nearly two-thirds of U.S. adults are overweight or obese. The extra heft contributes to many serious ailments.

Doctors know what to tell patients who want to lose weight: Eat less. Exercise more.

What vexes them is responding with answers rooted in credible science to the tougher question, "How do I keep the weight off?"...

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