

1 Title: Is pre-operation social connectedness associated with weight loss up to two years post  
2 bariatric surgery?

3 Abstract

4 Introduction: To date little attention has been paid to supportive relationships as factors  
5 contributing to weight loss from bariatric surgery.

6 Material and Methods: This prospective study examined whether total percentage weight loss  
7 (%TWL) at 3, 12 and 24 months post-surgery varies by distinct aspects of pre-surgery social support  
8 (received emotional and practical support and contact with friends and family) in a sample of  
9 bariatric surgery candidates (n = 182). These associations were tested with linear regression models  
10 adjusted for gender, age, ethnicity, employment status, self-esteem, mastery and time elapsed since  
11 the day of surgery.

12 Results: 154 participants underwent a bariatric procedure, and all but seven provided weight loss  
13 data at least at one occasion. Emotional support and contact with friends were positively associated  
14 with %TWL at 3, 12 and 24 months and the magnitude of these associations was large. For instance,  
15 in the fully-adjusted models, %TWL at 24 months increased by 2.36% (SE 1.17, p = 0.048) with each  
16 increase of one standard deviation in emotional support and was higher by 9.23% (SE 4.31, p =  
17 0.035) for participants who reported seeing 1-5 friends per month compared with those who saw  
18 none. There was some evidence for a positive association between practical support and %TWL at 3  
19 and 12 months post-surgery.

20 Conclusion: Supportive relationships are important contributors to weight loss from bariatric  
21 surgery. If replicated in future studies, these findings could inform clinical care and interventions  
22 aimed at improving support systems of bariatric surgery candidates.

23 Keywords: Close relationships; social support; gastric bypass; gastric sleeve; metabolic surgery;  
24 obesity; weight management

## 25 Introduction

26 Bariatric surgery is a surgical treatment of severe obesity and is currently considered the most  
27 effective weight loss solution [1,2]. Despite the overall effectiveness of bariatric surgery, there is a  
28 significant variability in weight loss achieved [3,4]. Typically, post-operation weight loss is rapid in  
29 the first few months and slows down around five to twelve months post-surgery [3,5]. In the longer  
30 term, weight tends to stabilise and may also be regained [6]. Understanding factors which contribute  
31 to successful weight loss over time is therefore of paramount importance to health care providers  
32 and individuals who undergo bariatric surgery.

33 The role of social networks in the development of obesity has been studied for over a decade [7,8]  
34 and evidence shows the health benefits of supportive relationships in the general population [9,10],  
35 including links between social support and health promoting behaviours [11,12] as well as, more  
36 recently, obesity risk itself [13–15]. While the possible importance of social support for post-  
37 operative weight loss in the bariatric population is recognised in key training texts [16], empirical  
38 evidence is scarce. It is conceivable that supportive close relationships in this population may aid the  
39 adjustment to post-surgery required lifestyle changes and follow-up clinical appointments, through  
40 positive encouragement and tangible assistance. Based on this, it is plausible that one's social  
41 support system could play an important role in short and long term weight loss.

42 Social support is often used to describe both the more objective characteristics of one's support  
43 network such as frequency of social contact (structural social support) as well as caring interactions  
44 between individuals such as emotional or practical support exchanges (functional social support)  
45 [17]. However, social support from close, interpersonal relationships rather than bariatric support  
46 groups has hardly been a primary focus of prospective, quantitative studies investigating weight loss  
47 from bariatric surgery. A few previous studies offer inconclusive results. For instance, emotional  
48 social support was positively associated with weight loss in a prospective study [18], however other  
49 prospective [19] and retrospective studies [20,21] did not find this association. Studies of structural

50 support, such as intensity of social contact have been rare and find little or no evidence of an  
51 association with post-operative weight loss [21,22]. Some of the inconsistencies found in previous  
52 studies could be explained by their multiple limitations such as retrospective study designs in which  
53 social support reports suffer from recall bias [20,21], small sample sizes of fewer than 45 participants  
54 [19,20], and varying weight loss outcome measures, including the use of widely criticised percentage  
55 excess weight loss (%EWL) [23,24]. Since previous studies have rarely intended to examine  
56 supportive social relationships specifically, they have not examined distinct aspects of social support  
57 and rarely used validated social support instruments. For instance, to the best of authors'  
58 knowledge, no previous quantitative studies have examined received practical support despite  
59 qualitative studies reporting its relevance for weight loss from bariatric surgery [25,26].

60 To address these limitations and answer calls for prospective studies of supportive relationships in  
61 bariatric surgery [21,27], this prospective study examined the pre-surgery functional and structural  
62 aspects of social support of bariatric surgery candidates using validated instruments and post-  
63 surgery weight loss using total percentage weight loss (%TWL). Using a single-centre cohort of  
64 bariatric surgery candidates this study investigated whether %TWL at 3, 12 and 24 months post-  
65 surgery varied according to functional social support (received emotional and practical support) and  
66 structural social support (number of friends and relatives seen on a monthly basis).

## 67 Methods

### 68 Study design and population

69 This study was designed as a prospective cohort study and was nested in a larger research project  
70 which received ethical approval from Health Research Authority. Bariatric surgery candidates aged  
71 over 18 years of age, proficient in English and due to undergo Roux-en-Y gastric bypass or sleeve  
72 gastrectomy were recruited from a bariatric clinic in a teaching hospital in the South East of England.  
73 The clinic follows National Institute of Clinical Excellence (2014) bariatric surgery eligibility guidelines  
74 and offers the service to patients with body mass index (BMI) of  $\geq 40$  kg/m<sup>2</sup>, BMI of  $\geq 35$  kg/m<sup>2</sup> if

75 obesity-related co-morbidity is present, or BMI  $<35 \text{ kg/m}^2$  if type 2 diabetes has been diagnosed  
76 within the last 10 years. Between November 2014 and June 2015, patients aged over 18 years who  
77 attended the clinic's pre-assessment appointment were invited to participate in the study and to  
78 complete a baseline questionnaire measuring social support, sociodemographic and psychological  
79 covariates. Of 201 invited to take part, 182 consented to take part and completed a baseline  
80 questionnaire, 158 had surgery and 154 were included in the main analyses (after excluding  
81 participants who became pregnant or had missing questionnaire data). Of 154 participants, 50 had  
82 Roux-en-Y gastric bypass and 104 had sleeve gastrectomy (see [3] for procedures description). All  
83 except seven participants returned for at least one post-surgery follow-up clinic appointment. One  
84 hundred thirty three participants had 3 month follow-up data, 130 had 12 month follow-up data and  
85 101 had 24 month follow-up data. Due to clinic's capacity and patients' cancellations the post-  
86 surgery follow-up clinic appointments did not always take place at exactly 3, 12 and 24 months,  
87 hence for the analyses the dates were centred at 84, 365 and 730 days respectively. Twenty four  
88 participants were refused the surgery, had to undergo further tests to confirm eligibility substantially  
89 delaying the surgery date, or decided not to pursue the surgery. The characteristics of participants  
90 who underwent the bariatric surgery and those who did not as well as those who attended and  
91 missed their post-surgery follow-up appointments are reported in the Supplementary Material  
92 (Tables S1 and S2).

93 Measures

94 Outcome

95 Weight in kilograms was measured using a Walkthrough Platform by a trained health professional  
96 during all pre- and post-surgery clinic appointments as well as on the day of surgery. Height in  
97 centimetres was measured using a stadiometer. Total percentage weight loss (%TWL) was calculated  
98 by subtracting weight at each post-surgery follow-up appointment (3, 12, and 24 months) from the

99 weight on the day of surgery and expressing the differences as percentage of the weight on the day  
100 of surgery.

#### 101 Social support

102 In order to capture both emotional and practical dimensions of social support received in a close  
103 relationship, the Close Persons Questionnaire [28], a validated scale previously included in some  
104 large-scale British cohort studies (e.g. the Whitehall II study and the National Survey of Health and  
105 Development) was used. The Close Persons Questionnaire asks about support received from up to  
106 four closest persons in the last 12 months, however the score of social support received from the  
107 closest person is predominantly examined [13,29] and was used here. Emotional support is assessed  
108 with 7 items (e.g. ‘how much in the last 12 months did you confide in this person?’ or ‘how much in  
109 the last 12 months did you share interests, hobbies and fun with this person?’). Practical support is  
110 assessed with 3 items (e.g. ‘how much in the last 12 months did this person give you practical help  
111 with major things?’). Each item is rated on a 4-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating  
112 greater received emotional and practical support and ranges of 0-21 and 0-9 respectively. Both  
113 support subscales displayed high to moderate internal validity in a non-clinical sample [28] as well as  
114 here – received emotional support (Cronbach Alpha  $\alpha=0.84$ ) and received practical support  
115 (Cronbach Alpha  $\alpha=0.78$ ). In previous large-scale studies of a non-clinical sample, mean scores for  
116 emotional support ranged between 13.1 to 15.8 and between 3.7 to 5.9 for practical support  
117 [30,31]. Social contact was assessed with two items: number of friends and acquaintances seen once  
118 a month and number of relatives seen once a month, both rated on a scale: “none”, “1-2”, “3-5”, “6-  
119 10”, “More than 10”.

#### 120 Covariates

121 Demographic data (age, ethnicity and gender) were obtained from the patient’s clinical records. The  
122 clinical records specified ethnic groups as “White British”, “White Other”, “White/Black Asian”,  
123 “Mixed background”, “Indian”, “Other Asian”, “Caribbean”, “African”, “Other Black background”,

124 “Other” and “Not stated”. Due to low numbers in ethnic minority groups, ethnicity was coded for  
125 the analyses as: “White British and other White ethnicities”, “Non-White ethnicities” and “Not  
126 stated”. Paid employment status (currently in paid employment: yes vs. no) was asked in the  
127 baseline questionnaire administered to patients. Self-esteem was measured with the widely-used  
128 the Rosenberg scale of global self-esteem [32], with 10 items rated on a 4-point scale and scores  
129 ranging from 0-30 (Cronbach Alpha  $\alpha=0.88$ ). Mastery of one’s life, a concept related to self-efficacy,  
130 was measured with the Pearlin Mastery Scale [33], which consists of 7 items rated on a 4-point scale  
131 and scores ranging from 7-28 (Cronbach Alpha  $\alpha=0.79$ ).

### 132 Statistical Analysis

133 A series of linear regression models were used to examine the associations between social support  
134 at baseline and %TWL at 3, 12 and 24 months. Each social support variable was analysed separately  
135 in a series of models adjusted for days since surgery centred at 3 months (84 days) and 12 months  
136 (365 days) and 24 months (740 days) (Model 1) as well as fully-adjusted models adjusting  
137 additionally for age and gender, ethnicity and employment, self-esteem and mastery (Model 2).

### 138 Results

139 The progressive weight loss since day of surgery is reported in Table 1. Mean %TWL steadily  
140 increased over the first 12 months post-surgery, following which it stabilised. Mean %TWL at 3, 12  
141 and 24 months was: 14.7% (SD 4.1), 25.6% (SD 7.8), 25.2% (SD 10.2) respectively. Participants’  
142 baseline characteristics can be found in Table 2. Participants who did not proceed with the bariatric  
143 surgery reported less emotional and practical support compared with those who had one of the two  
144 procedures (Supplementary Material, Table S1). Missing any post-surgery follow-up appointment  
145 was associated with younger age and missing the 24 months post-surgery follow-up appointment  
146 was associated with lower practical support (Supplementary Material, Table S2).

147 Reporting higher received emotional support and seeing more friends on a monthly basis prior to  
148 surgery were associated with increased weight loss at 3, 12 and 24 months post-surgery (Table 3). In  
149 the fully-adjusted models, with each additional point on the emotional support scale, %TWL  
150 increased by 0.16% ( $p = 0.08$ ), 0.37% ( $p = 0.042$ ) and 0.60% ( $p = 0.048$ ) at, respectively, 3, 12 and 24  
151 months post-surgery. Compared with participants who reported seeing no friends on a monthly  
152 basis, those who reported seeing 1-5 friends and 6 or more friends experienced, respectively, 2.96%  
153 ( $p = 0.032$ ) and 3.33% ( $p = 0.020$ ) higher %TWL at 3 months post-surgery, and 9.23% ( $p = 0.035$ ) and  
154 7.90% ( $p = 0.08$ ) higher %TWL at 24 months post-surgery, in the fully-adjusted models. Received  
155 practical support showed a borderline positive association with %TWL at 3 months ( $\beta = 0.26$ , SE 0.14,  
156  $p = 0.054$ ) and 12 months post-surgery ( $\beta = 0.47$ , SE 0.28,  $p = 0.09$ ) in the fully-adjusted models. No  
157 associations between %TWL and number of relatives seen per month were found.

#### 158 Conclusion

159 These results add to the wider literature on the role of social support in weight loss interventions  
160 [34] and extend it by demonstrating that supportive relationships are associated with increased  
161 weight loss from bariatric surgery. The findings that received emotional support is positively  
162 associated with %TWL is consistent with a prospective quantitative study of social support and  
163 weight loss [18] and disagrees with prospective [19] and retrospective studies [20,21] which found  
164 no association. Qualitative studies suggest that emotional support from close others takes various  
165 forms such as positive encouragement for maintaining required post-surgery lifestyle changes and  
166 empathy for one's struggles which together contribute to feelings of closeness in relationships and  
167 weight loss success [26,35]. Previous quantitative studies however have failed to measure social  
168 support with a validated instrument capturing the key emotional dimension of support [18,19] or  
169 separating it from practical aspects of support [20,21], thus making direct comparisons with present  
170 study challenging. Received emotional support appeared to be important throughout the whole  
171 bariatric surgery journey, as the participants who did not proceed to bariatric surgery reported lower  
172 levels of emotional support compared to the counterparts who had the surgery.

173 Seeing more friends on a monthly basis was associated with greater %TWL, and the magnitude of  
174 these associations was substantial. For instance, seeing 1-5 friends per month compared with none  
175 was associated with 9.23% or 0.88 standard deviation higher %TWL at 24 months post-surgery.  
176 Differences of such magnitude are also clinically significant, as a previous study reports a 7%  
177 increase in the odds of type 2 diabetes remission for every 1% weight loss [36]. This finding is in  
178 partial agreement with a prospective study which reported a borderline positive association  
179 between number of confidants and %EWL [22]. This is in contrast to a retrospective study which did  
180 not find an association between the number of friends and %EWL [21]. Meeting with a greater  
181 number of friends could indicate higher chances of meeting one's emotional and practical support  
182 needs post-surgery. No evidence for an association between seeing relatives on a monthly basis and  
183 weight loss was found. This may be because, in addition to providing support, family can be a  
184 common source of weight stigma and negative interactions for obese individuals, often contributing  
185 to strategies of eating to cope [37,38].

186 The results indicated a positive association between received practical support and %TWL in the  
187 fully-adjusted models. The surgery begins a difficult process during which individuals face challenges  
188 of new food tolerance, old cravings and adherence to new life style regimen [26,35]. Learning to  
189 place one's health needs as a priority is crucial in order to maintain weight loss in the long run [35].  
190 Practical help during this time such as assistance with everyday tasks and reminders about post-  
191 surgery requirements may facilitate this learning process and therefore contribute to bariatric  
192 surgery success. Interestingly, participants who received less practical support were less likely to  
193 proceed to bariatric surgery in the first place and to return to the 24 months post-surgery follow-up  
194 appointment.

195 The strengths of this study include its prospective design, the use of validated social relationship  
196 scales and commonly accepted %TWL instead of widely criticised %EWL which dominated the  
197 previous studies. A few limitations should be acknowledged. Though comparable in size to previous



198 related studies, statistical power was moderate and some differences %TWL of clinical significance  
199 attained only borderline statistical significance. Despite a low attrition rate (only 7 out of 154  
200 participants did not return to any post-surgery follow-up appointment), participants who missed all  
201 or some follow-up appointments could introduce bias due to their younger age, potentially lower  
202 practical support levels and other unobserved factors. Questionnaire item non-response was  
203 observed for only four participants and was handled with listwise deletion, which was considered  
204 unlikely to significantly bias the results. Furthermore, participants who proceeded to surgery  
205 reported higher emotional and practical support potentially leading to overestimation of the  
206 associations. Social support was measured at baseline, though qualitative studies indicate changes  
207 to patient's social networks following surgery that may be important for weight loss. For example,  
208 prioritising friendships which accommodate patient's post-surgery lifestyles by changing socialising  
209 from food-centred to activity-based pursuits [26]. A recent large-scale, quantitative study has also  
210 reported frequent changes to marital relationships status following bariatric surgery including both  
211 dissolution of existing relationships and entering new ones, which could have implications for  
212 availability and levels of received social support [39]. Lastly, due to small sample size and incomplete  
213 clinical records, the measure of ethnicity used here was crude and precluded analyses in specific  
214 ethnic groups.

215 This study addressed a significant gap in bariatric literature by reporting pre-surgery supportive  
216 relationships and their prospective relationship with %TWL at 3, 12 and 24 months post-surgery. The  
217 findings indicate that emotional support and contact with friends are important factors substantially  
218 contributing to weight loss over time. If these results are replicated in future studies, they would  
219 suggest that bariatric surgery candidates should be supported in cultivating their close relationships  
220 in order to improve their post-surgery weight loss prognosis.

221 Table 1 Pre-surgery weight and post-surgery weight loss levels at each post-surgery time point, max  
 222 n=152, 2014-2017, UK.

		<b>Weight in kg</b>	<b>%TWL</b>	<b>BMI (kg/m<sup>2</sup>)</b>	<b>Days since surgery</b>
	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean (SD)</b>	<b>Mean (SD)</b>	<b>Mean (SD)</b>	<b>Mean (SD)</b>
Day of surgery	152	126.6 (27.9)	-----	45.0 (7.2)	-----
3 months post-surgery	133	107.3 (25.4)	14.7 (4.1)	38.2 (6.5)	97.2 (13.0)
12 months post-surgery	130	92.8 (22.4)	25.6 (7.8)	33.1 (6.1)	369.7 (52.7)
24 months post-surgery	101	92.6 (23.3)	25.2 (10.2)	33.2 (6.1)	709.7 (80.8)

223 Abbreviation: %TWL, percentage of weight loss relative to day of surgery weight; BMI, body mass

224 index.

225 Table 2 Descriptive characteristics of participants who had bariatric surgery, n=154, 2014-2017, UK.

Variables included the analyses	Mean (SD) or N (%)
<b>Demographic and socioeconomic covariates</b>	
Gender	
Women	112 (72.7%)
Men	42 (27.3%)
Age on the day of surgery	45.8 (11.9)
Ethnicity	
White ethnicities	115 (74.7%)
Non-White ethnicities	25 (16.2%)
Not stated	14 (9.1%)
Employed	
Yes	90 (58.4%)
No	64 (41.6%)
<b>Psychological covariates</b>	
Rosenberg's self-esteem scale (0-30)	19.4 (5.9)
Pearlin's mastery scale (7-28)	20.8 (3.5)
<b>Functional social support</b>	
Received emotional support (0-21)	16.8 (3.9)
Received practical support (0-9)	6.3 (2.6)
<b>Structural social support</b>	
Number of friends seen per month	
None	9 (5.8%)
1-5 friends	80 (52.0%)
6+ friends	65 (42.2%)
Number of relatives seen per month	
None	11 (7.1%)
1-5 relatives	77 (50.0%)
6+ relatives	66 (42.9%)

226

227 Table 3 Associations between pre-surgery social support levels and post-surgery weight loss derived from linear regression models, 2014-2017, UK.

	3 months %TWL (n = 133)		12 months %TWL (n = 130)		24 months %TWL (n = 101)	
	$\beta$ (SE)	p	$\beta$ (SE)	p	$\beta$ (SE)	p
M1: Received emotional support	<b>0.18 (0.08)</b>	<b>0.031</b>	<b>0.37 (0.17)</b>	<b>0.030</b>	<b>0.55 (0.29)</b>	<b>0.050</b>
M2: Received emotional support	0.16 (0.09)	0.08	<b>0.37 (0.18)</b>	<b>0.042</b>	<b>0.60 (0.30)</b>	<b>0.048</b>
M1: Received practical support	0.14 (0.13)	0.30	0.33 (0.27)	0.23	0.72 (0.43)	0.10
M2: Received practical support	<b>0.26 (0.14)</b>	<b>0.054</b>	0.47 (0.28)	0.09	0.72 (0.44)	0.10
M1: Number of friends seen per month ( <i>ref none</i> )						
1-5 friends	<b>3.44 (1.32)</b>	<b>0.010</b>	4.99 (3.12)	0.11	<b>8.60 (4.32)</b>	<b>0.049</b>
6+ friends	<b>4.13 (1.35)</b>	<b>0.003</b>	5.44 (3.15)	0.09	6.84 (4.40)	0.12
M2: Number of friends seen per month ( <i>ref none</i> )						
1-5 friends	<b>2.96 (1.36)</b>	<b>0.032</b>	5.01 (3.14)	0.11	<b>9.23 (4.31)</b>	<b>0.035</b>
6+ friends	<b>3.33 (1.41)</b>	<b>0.020</b>	5.08 (3.20)	0.11	7.90 (4.42)	0.08
M1: Number of relatives seen per month ( <i>ref none</i> )						
1-5 relatives	0.67 (1.26)	0.59	0.34 (2.97)	0.91	-0.50 (3.70)	0.89
6+ relatives	0.54 (1.28)	0.67	0.54 (3.00)	0.86	-3.20 (3.73)	0.39
M2: Number of relatives seen per month ( <i>ref none</i> )						
1-5 relatives	0.43 (1.28)	0.74	-1.21 (3.02)	0.69	-3.28 (3.75)	0.39
6+ relatives	0.32 (1.29)	0.81	-0.70 (3.03)	0.82	-5.41 (3.76)	0.15

228 **M1: Model 1** crude model adjusting only for days since surgery at each time point.

229 **M2: Model 2** fully-adjusted model adjusting for: Model 1 + gender, age, ethnicity, employment, self-esteem and mastery.

230 Supplementary material

231 Table 4 Characteristics of participants who underwent bariatric surgery (n=154) and those who did not (n=24),  
 232 2014-2017, UK.

	Participant underwent bariatric surgery		P
	Yes (n = 154) N (%) or mean (SD)	No (n = 24) N (%) or mean (SD)	
Total			
Gender: Women	112 (72.7)	13 (54.2)	0.06
Age on the pre-surgery assessment visit	45.6 (11.9)	49.4 (11.4)	0.15
Ethnicity			
White British & other White	115 (74.7)	15 (62.5)	0.21
Non-White ethnicities	25 (16.2)	4 (16.7)	
Not stated ethnicity	14 (9.1)	5 (20.8)	
Employed: Yes vs. No	90 (58.4)	14 (58.3)	0.99
Rosenberg's self-esteem scale (0-30)	19.4 (5.9)	19.3 (5.9)	0.93
Pearlin's mastery scale (7-28)	20.3 (3.4)	20.8 (3.5)	0.55
Received emotional support (0-21)	<b>16.8 (3.9)</b>	<b>14.5 (4.8)</b>	<b>&lt;0.01</b>
Received practical support (0-9)	<b>6.3 (2.6)</b>	<b>4.9 (3.1)</b>	<b>0.02</b>
Number of friends seen per month			
None	9 (5.8)	1 (4.2)	0.33
1-5	80 (52.0)	9 (37.5)	
6+	65 (42.2)	14 (58.3)	
Number of relatives seen per month			
None	11 (7.1)	4 (16.7)	0.23
1-5	77 (50.0)	9 (37.5)	
6+	66 (42.9)	11 (45.8)	

233

234 Table 5 Characteristics of participants who missed a follow-up appointment and those who stayed in the study, 2014-2017, UK.

	Missed 3 months follow-up		Missed 12 months follow-up		Missed 24 months follow-up	
	Yes (n = 21) N (%) / mean (SD)	No (n = 133) N (%) / mean (SD)	Yes (n = 24) N (%) / mean (SD)	No (n = 130) N (%) / mean (SD)	Yes (n = 53) N (%) / mean (SD)	No (n = 101) N (%) / mean (SD)
Total						
Gender: Women	17 (81.0%)	95 (71.4%)	16 (66.7%)	96 (73.9%)	35 (66.0%)	77 (76.2%)
Age on the day of surgery	<b>38.9 (12.6)</b>	<b>46.9 (11.5)***</b>	<b>38.8 (11.1)</b>	<b>47.1 (11.6)***</b>	<b>43.6 (11.8)</b>	<b>47.0 (11.9)*</b>
Ethnicity						
White British & other White	17 (81.0%)	98 (73.7%)	19 (79.2%)	96 (73.8%)	39 (73.6%)	76 (75.3%)
Non-White ethnicities	3 (14.3%)	22 (16.5%)	5 (20.8%)	20 (15.4%)	7 (13.2%)	18 (17.8%)
Not stated ethnicity	1 (4.7%)	13 (9.8%)	0	14 (10.8%)	7 (13.2%)	7 (6.9%)
Employed: Yes vs. No	13 (61.9%)	77 (57.9%)	15 (62.5%)	75 (57.7%)	34 (64.2%)	56 (55.5%)
Rosenberg's self-esteem scale (0-30)	20.2 (6.3)	19.3 (5.9)	19.6 (19.4)	19.4 (5.9)	19.6 (5.7)	19.3 (6.1)
Pearlin's mastery scale (0-28)	21.2 (2.8)	20.7 (3.6)	20.9 (3.7)	20.8 (3.4)	20.6 (3.4)	20.9 (3.5)
Received emotional support (0-21)	17.5 (3.2)	16.7 (4.0)	17.3 (3.3)	16.7 (4.0)	16.5 (4.5)	17.0 (3.6)
Received practical support (0-9)	6.2 (3.3)	6.3 (2.5)	6.2 (3.0)	6.3 (2.5)	<b>5.7 (2.9)</b>	<b>6.5 (2.4)*</b>
Number of friends seen per month						
None	0	9 (6.8%)	2 (8.3%)	7 (5.4%)	3 (5.6%)	6 (5.9%)
1-5	10 (47.6%)	70 (52.6%)	12 (50.0%)	68 (52.3%)	25 (47.2%)	55 (54.5%)
6+	11 (52.4%)	54 (40.6%)	10 (41.7%)	55 (42.3%)	25 (47.2%)	40 (39.6%)
Number of relatives seen per month						
None	0	11 (8.3%)	3 (12.5%)	8 (6.2%)	2 (3.8%)	9 (8.9%)
1-5	12 (57.1%)	65 (49.9%)	12 (50.0%)	65 (50.0%)	28 (52.8%)	49 (48.5%)
6+	9 (42.9%)	57 (42.8%)	9 (37.5%)	57 (43.8%)	23 (43.4%)	43 (42.6%)

235 \* p&lt;0.1; \*\* p&lt;0.05; \*\*\* p&lt;0.001

236 **Ethical statement (blinded)**

237 All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical  
238 standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration  
239 and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Ethical approval for this study was granted by the  
240 Health Research Authority's National Research Ethics Service Committee London - Harrow.

241 **Informed consent**

242 Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

243 **Conflict of Interest**

244 All but three authors declare that they have no conflict of interest. Author 1 reports grants from Fractyl,  
245 other from Novo Nordisk, other from Orexigen, other from Medtronic, other from Ethicon, other from  
246 Nestle, outside the submitted work. Author 2 reports grants and personal fees from Olympus, grants and  
247 other from Ethicon, grants and personal fees from Gore, other from Stryker, outside the submitted work.  
248 Author 3 reports other from Johnson & Johnson, personal fees from WL Gore, personal fees and other from  
249 Olympus Keymed, outside the submitted work.

250 **Funding (please see Title page)**

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