

Participant Information Sheet (PIS) for Users of Weight-Loss Programmes

Study Title: Tightening the Waist Band: Is better regulation needed to reduce harmful practices of the diet industry?

What is the purpose of the study?

My name is Jaimie, and I am a PhD student at the University of Bristol. This research is part of my PhD thesis. The study examines the experiences of women who use (or have used) weight-loss programmes, focusing on how these programmes affect their well-being, including their mental health, self-esteem, and relationship with food.

Additionally, the study explores the rules and regulations surrounding weight-loss programmes to understand whether these programmes are operating in ways that protect their users. By highlighting how these programmes work and their potential harms, the research aims to provide recommendations to improve safety and support for customers. Examples of harms include feelings of guilt, pressure to lose weight, or the impact of harmful advice given during participation in these programmes.

This research seeks to shed light on how weight-loss programmes operate in today's digital era, where online tools, apps, and virtual support groups are increasingly shaping users' experiences.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been invited because you are over 18, identify as a woman, and have experience with one or more weight-loss programmes. Your insights will provide important perspectives on the impact of these programmes on people's health, well-being, and relationship with food.

Selection Process and Pre-Screening Questionnaire

This Participant Information Sheet has been sent alongside a **pre-screening questionnaire** that you are invited to complete. The pre-screening questionnaire will take approximately 10 minutes to complete and will collect basic demographic and experiential information.

Please note: Receiving this Participant Information Sheet does not guarantee participation in the interview phase of the study. The pre-screening questionnaire is used to help narrow down participants to ensure diversity and relevance to the research.

If you are selected to participate, you will be contacted within two weeks of submitting the pre-screening questionnaire to schedule your interview. If you are not selected, you will also be informed via email during this period.

What will happen if I take part?

If you agree to participate, you will take part in a semi-structured interview lasting 60–90 minutes. The interview can be conducted online or at a time and location that suits you. The discussion will be recorded to ensure accuracy.

You will receive a **Participant Information Sheet (this document)** and be asked to review it and sign a consent form before the interview. After the interview, you will have the opportunity to review your transcript to ensure it accurately reflects your responses.

If requested, you will receive a copy of your interview transcript via a password-protected file sent to your email within two weeks of your interview. You will then have two weeks to review the transcript before analysis begins and provide any comments, corrections, or clarifications. If you do not respond within this timeframe, it will be assumed that you are satisfied with the content.

What will I be asked about?

During the interview, you will be asked about the following topics:

- Your reasons for joining a weight-loss programme and the type of programme you used
- How the programme impacted your physical health, mental health, and social well-being.
- Your views on the advice and guidance provided by the programme (e.g., whether it felt safe or supportive).
- Whether you think the programme prioritised customer safety or its business interests.
- Your perspectives on whether the programme followed appropriate rules or regulations, and whether there are gaps in consumer protection.

You are welcome to skip any questions you do not wish to answer.

Secure Data Transfer:

The transcript will be sent as a password-protected PDF file to the email address you provided during the consent process. A separate email containing the password will be sent to you for security. Your data will be handled in accordance with the University of Bristol's data protection policies, ensuring confidentiality at all times.

What will happen if I don't take part?

Participation is entirely voluntary. Choosing not to take part will have no impact on your access to services or your relationship with the researcher or their institution.

Anonymisation

Your responses will be anonymised, and identifying information (e.g., your name, location) will be removed. You will be referred to in research outputs using a pseudonym.

Limits of confidentiality

While every effort will be made to protect your identity, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed if contextual information inadvertently links back to you. Additionally, confidentiality may need to be breached if you disclose information that suggests significant harm to yourself or others. In such cases, appropriate authorities or support services may be informed, and you will be made aware of this process.

What will my information be used for?

Your anonymised data will be used for my PhD thesis and may appear in academic publications or presentations. The data will also be preserved and made available for future research through open-access repositories. Additionally, the findings may be shared more widely through blogs, articles, or other media platforms to ensure the research reaches a broader audience. Participants will be fully informed of this during the consent process and will have the opportunity to ask questions and provide explicit written consent for the sharing of their anonymised data.

As a way of thanking participants for their time and contribution, a user-friendly summary of the study's findings will be created and shared with those who express interest. This summary will provide key insights from the research in an accessible format without overwhelming participants with the full academic thesis.

What anonymised data will be available for future use by researchers?

Anonymised data from this study will be preserved and made available for future research in a secure, open-access repository. This ensures that the findings can contribute to further research while maintaining participant confidentiality.

Right to erasure

You have the right to withdraw your participation or request the deletion of your data at any time within two weeks of receiving your transcript for review, before analysis begins. After this point, your anonymised data may be included in the analysis and cannot be removed.

Further contact details

For general enquiries about the study, please contact: Jaimie O'Connor at df18670@bristol.ac.uk

For complaints about the research practice, please contact: Jo Large at jo.large@bristol.ac.uk or Zoi Toumpakari at zoi.toumpakari@bristol.ac.uk