



You may have seen some of these popular diet programs advertised on TV or social media, but are they right for people with SCI/D?

### It's the beginning of

another new year, and getting it off to a healthy start by eating better can be a popular and worthy goal for many people.

Weight loss is one of the top health goals for people with a spinal-cord injury or disease (SCI/D) due to various secondary health issues that can arise from their condition. More than 65% of individuals with SCI/D are considered overweight, with a third of these individuals being obese. Because of this, people often seek out the latest and greatest diets.

There are many weight loss programs available, but lately, several seem to show up most often on the airwaves and social media. These programs are popular, but

they may come with their own set of risks for people with SCI/D, and it's important to take a closer look at them.

### Noom

A website and mobile app for your smartphone or tablet, Noom is based on a lifestyle approach for long-term weight loss and health goals.

The program has a focus on a cognitive behavioral therapy approach with certified health coaches at your disposal to help answer questions and guide you through your pro-



Noom's mobile app and website take a lifestyle approach for long-term weight loss.

by Kylie James,  
CNP, & Joanne  
Smith, CNP

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gram. It's based on establishing healthy eating habits as opposed to more extreme quick-fix weight loss.

Noom emphasizes not only what you eat but why you eat, as well. If you're an emotional eater or your eating habits are based on how you're feeling, then this might be a great approach for you.

The program also has a diabetes prevention program that has been officially recognized by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This is great for the SCI/D population, since the risk of diabetes among them is higher than the able-bodied population.

### Pros

There are a number of research studies on Noom.

A study published in the May 2018 issue of the *Journal of Medical Internet Research* showed that after 12 weeks of using Noom, participants lost an average of 7.5% of their body fat, and after one year, they had maintained a loss of 5.2%.

Long-term steady weight loss, as outlined by Noom, is the goal for individuals with SCI/D, since rapid weight loss can contribute to more muscle breakdown. That's a problem for those with SCI/D since muscle breakdown already occurs as a direct result of injury.

Noom also has an educational approach, providing daily articles and information, and you're not restricted on what you eat so there's a lot of flexibility.

### Cons

Although you have certified health coaches at your disposal, they're not certified nutritionists or dietitians, nor do they have experience with the intricacies and specificities of individuals with SCI/D.

You need to record and track all the food you eat and your workouts, which can be a positive since it keeps you accountable and you have a clear picture of what you're consuming. However, this can be time-consuming.

It may also be pricey. At a minimum of \$59 per month, Noom costs more than many



GOLO.COM

The GOLO diet program focuses on managing insulin for weight loss.

people may be willing or able to spend on a weight loss program, and the diabetes version is even more expensive.

Additionally, the calorie calculations will not be SCI/D-appropriate, since calorie requirements for those with SCI/D are lower than in the able-bodied population.

For more information, visit [noom.com](http://noom.com).

### GOLO

The main aim of the GOLO diet is to improve overall health and lose belly fat with a specific focus on managing insulin for weight loss.

It's a calorie-restricted diet of 1,300–1,800 calories a day and was founded by a psychiatrist, as well as various doctors and pharmacists. The diet has a 30-, 60- or 90-day plan and to start the diet, you'll need to order their supplement, as well as receive the GOLO for Life guidebook and support (meal plans, coach support and exclusive products), which the company says is a \$199 value. It also has an exercise component of at least 15 minutes of high-intensity workouts a day.

A small randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled study on GOLO was published in the peer-reviewed journal *Trends in Diabetes and Metabolism* in May 2019 and is linked on the company's website. It consisted of 68 partici-

pants, and those who followed the GOLO diet and took their supplement lost about 13 pounds over 13 weeks compared with those in the placebo group, who lost about 7.5 pounds.

### Pros

GOLO focuses on nutrient-dense, whole foods while avoiding processed foods, refined grains and sugars, which is the basis of any healthy long-term weight loss plan.

GOLO reports its plan is focused more specifically on insulin and blood pressure management, which is important for anyone with SCI/D, as these are issues that are common amongst this population.

This diet can be flexible to fit into an individual's specific needs and preferences. There's also a Facebook community that can provide support to help an individual on his or her weight loss journey.

### Cons

This is a very expensive weight loss program that includes supplements.

Also, because the focus is on managing insulin and blood pressure, if you're diabetic, taking diabetic medication or have hypertension, then you need to be closely monitored by a physician, as medication may need to be adjusted.

There's a lack of scientific knowledge around the diet, and the focus is on short-term, quick weight loss. This isn't ideal, as clients who often complete diet programs like this put the weight back on after they go off the diet.

For more information, visit [golo.com](http://golo.com).

### Weight Watchers

Around for more than 50 years, Weight Watchers is a customized and flexible program.

The program is based on a "SmartPoints" system, which assigns every food and beverage a point value based on its nutrition and leverages details about food preferences and



Weight Watchers has a mobile app and website and offers a customized, flexible diet plan.

lifestyle to match each member to one of three comprehensive ways to follow the program. Program backbones include support via the Weight Watchers app, expert-led workshops and Digital 360 plans to provide practical tools and behavior-change techniques for help along the way.

Basically, you can eat what you want, but you're limited by how much based on the SmartPoints system. The budget is divided into a daily and weekly value to allow more flexibility. The company offers thousands of recipes, each with a SmartPoints value, to show how it fits into your eating plan. It's one of the most flexible diet plans out on the market.

### Pros

You don't have to buy any special foods or supplements, which makes the program sustainable over the long term.

Weight Watchers has been studied significantly with positive results showing that people lose weight and can maintain weight loss over the long term.

The program offers one-on-one coaching and emotional and group support, which is important, since eating habits can often be linked to emotional biases.

### Cons

Because no foods are really off limits, a person can use his or her points for junk food, but this would limit how much food he or she could eat throughout the day. So, there's the opportunity to "cheat the system" and follow an unhealthy eating pattern.

Weight Watchers can be costly, and counting points can be tedious, as you have to do this every time you put something in your mouth. It also relies on weekly weigh-ins, which could be problematic for most people with SCI/D.

For more information, visit [weightwatchers.com](http://weightwatchers.com).

### What To Look For

It's important to note that whether it's these plans or another, there's no one-diet-fits-all. A diet plan has to be flexible enough to be sustained over the long term and fit into an individual's lifestyle.

There are some key things to look for in weight-loss program, especially if you have SCI/D:

- Is the program sustainable and realistic to implement over the long term?
- Is it conducive to blood sugar balance, since glucose intolerance is common among people with SCI/D?
- Is it cost-effective?
- Does it promote more long-term weight loss results as opposed to quick weight loss, which can contribute to muscle breakdown (a health risk for people with SCI/D)?

Commercial weight loss plans can often be costly and may not take into account the unique individual needs of the participant, especially those with SCI/D. If you decide to explore a commercial weight loss program, check with your health practitioner.

*Kylie James and Joanne Smith are certified nutrition practitioners and co-authors of the Paralyzed Veterans of America-supported book Eat Well, Live Well with Spinal Cord Injury and Other Neurological Conditions.* ■

