Questions You May Have About Nutrisystem

In their article “Recommendations for Treatment of Child and Adolescent Overweight and Obesity,” Spear and colleagues (Pediatrics 2007; 120:S254-S288) provided a list of questions that primary care physicians can use when evaluating commercial weight loss programs. We’ve answered each of these questions below. Please feel free to contact dietitian@nutrisystem.com with any additional questions or concerns you may have.

Do you have a program for adolescents?

Yes. Nutrisystem has developed a weight control program for adolescents who are 14-17 years old. This program, Nutrisystem for Teens, was designed to meet the age-appropriate nutritional targets specified in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans – 2010 and to address the target behaviors that the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends for weight control in adolescents (Spear et al. Pediatrics 2007).

Must participants purchase proprietary meals?

Yes. The Nutrisystem approach to healthy weight management is to provide nutritionally-balanced, portion-controlled entrées and snacks. Numerous research studies show that adding structure to dietary recommendations (i.e., by using specific meal plans or providing portion-controlled foods) significantly enhances adherence to a low-calorie diet and improves weight loss, compared with instruction to consume a low-calorie diet of self-selected foods.

What type of counseling/behavior modification models do you follow?

The AAP treatment recommendations specify several behavioral targets of a weight management program for obese children and adolescents. Nutrisystem for Teens includes behavioral support materials for both the adolescent and parent/caregiver to assist in setting goals for, and achieving, each of the specified target behaviors. These materials provide instruction in behavioral skills, and are rooted in social cognitive theory, classical and operant conditioning, and self-efficacy to take a positive approach to behavior change. Adolescents and parents/caregivers are encouraged to schedule weekly “sit-down” times with each other to review the materials and monitor progress with development of appropriate weight management skills.

Do you offer nutrition and exercise counseling/education?

Yes. Adolescents participating in the Nutrisystem for Teens program (and their parents/caregivers) have free phone and e-mail access to a team of Nutrisystem weight loss counselors who have been specifically trained in adolescent weight management. For customers who choose not to contact our weight loss counselors, the skill-building materials described above provide direction relevant to healthy eating, exercise, and behavior.
What are your immediate and long-term weight loss results?

Our programs are designed to induce a weight loss of 1 to 2 pounds per week. Because our program is delivered to customers (and not clinic-based), the large majority of our efficacy data is based on self-reported weights that customers enter using our online tracking tool. Analysis of this data suggests that adult customers who remain engaged with the program lost an average of 8.3% of their weight at 3 months and 12.1% at 6 months. Two randomized controlled trials of the Nutrisystem D program (i.e., our program for adults with type 2 diabetes) found a mean reductions of approximately 7% of initial body weight at 6 months. Data are not yet available for the Nutrisystem for Teens program.

What are the initial and long-term costs?

There are no enrollment or membership costs. The food is generally sold in 28-day packages that include three meal entrées and one or two snacks per day. Customers must supplement the foods they purchase from Nutrisystem with grocery items (e.g., fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy items). The cost of a 28-day package is approximately $270 for adolescent girls and $300 for adolescent boys (the higher cost of the boys’ program is due to the greater amount of food provided). Including the costs of grocery additions, we estimate that current customers who follow the Nutrisystem program spend 15%-40% less than the average American spends on food per month.

What is your attrition rate?

As with most weight control programs – whether clinical or commercial – attrition from Nutrisystem is high. A specific rate of attrition is difficult to determine for a variety of reasons: 1) there is no defined amount of time that customers should be on the program; 2) variability in customers’ weight loss goals results in some customers discontinuing after 1-2 months because they have met their weight loss goal; and 3) many customers who cancel a food order place another order in the following months. On average, adult customers purchase 2-3 months’ worth of food. These data are not yet available for the Nutrisystem for Teens program.

Do you offer culturally appropriate services?

The Nutrisystem menu includes approximately 100 entrées and 30 snack/dessert items representing a variety of cuisines. A full lacto-ovo-vegetarian diet is available; however, a full Kosher or Halal diet is not. Nutritionists and dietitians from our Dietary Services team are available to help customers select items to meet specific dietary preferences or needs.

Do you advocate complementary/alternative weight loss methods?

Nutrisystem encourages consumption of a daily multivitamin/mineral supplement, which customers must purchase on their own. Although calcium and omega-3 fatty acid supplements are available through Nutrisystem, our program for teens does not include these supplements. Over-the-counter medications or weight loss products are NOT a part of any Nutrisystem program.