



# The Science Behind The First13 Program

And Why It Can Work for You

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Evidence-based nutrition education and behaviour change,  
designed and delivered by Accredited Practising Dietitians.

**Not fads. Not influencers. Science.**

Based on a synthesis of 3.3 million+ academic papers via Consensus AI



## Why Most Diets Don't Last

If you've ever lost weight only to put it back on, you're not alone. And it's not your fault.

Decades of research, spanning millions of academic papers, now point to the same conclusion: the reason most diets fail has nothing to do with willpower or discipline. It has everything to do with how the program is designed.

Most weight loss programs focus on what you eat. They hand you a meal plan, maybe an exercise schedule, and send you on your way. The research shows this approach rarely produces lasting results. What does work is addressing how you think, how you feel, and how you manage the inevitable ups and downs of change.

That's exactly what the First13 program was designed to do.

This document shares what the latest peer-reviewed science says about long-term weight management, and shows how each finding is built into the First13 program's structure. This isn't marketing spin. It's the evidence, drawn from systematic reviews, randomised controlled trials, and studies cited hundreds of times by other researchers.

**Long-term weight management rarely depends on diet or exercise alone. How people think, feel, and self-manage is what determines whether changes last.**

# What the Research Says, and What First13 Does About It

## 1. Your Mindset Matters More Than Your Meal Plan

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### What the research says

Self-regulation skills (setting goals, tracking progress, solving problems as they come up) and self-efficacy (your confidence that you can actually make changes) are the strongest predictors of whether weight loss lasts. This finding appears again and again across major reviews, including Teixeira et al. (2015, BMC Medicine, 639 citations) and Greaves et al. (2017, Health Psychology Review, 146 citations).

### The First13 Approach

First13 doesn't start with what to eat. It starts with how you think. Every weekly module follows a carefully designed sequence: first, we make sure you feel understood (not judged). Then we share the evidence. Only then do we invite you to take action. Self-regulation tools are woven through every worksheet, from the very first week through to Weeks 12 and 13 where you'll work on resilience and self-esteem.

## 2. Flexibility Beats Rigid Rules

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### What the research says

People who adopt flexible, realistic thinking about food (accepting that setbacks happen, avoiding all-or-nothing rules like "no carbs ever") consistently achieve better long-term outcomes than people who follow rigid dietary rules. Rigid restraint actually predicts worse results.

### The First13 Approach

There are no forbidden foods in the First13 program. No points, no guilt, no punishment for a bad day. Instead, every module includes a Support section that normalises setbacks and teaches you how to recover from them. Week 12 tackles self-sabotage, perfectionism, and the fear of failure head on, because the research is clear: learning to be kind to yourself is one of the most powerful tools for lasting change.

### 3. Your Own Reasons Matter Most

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#### What the research says

Intrinsic motivation (caring about your health, your energy, how you feel day to day) predicts much better long-term weight control than motivation based purely on appearance. Teixeira et al. (2015) found that people who changed for their own deeply held reasons were far more likely to sustain it.

#### The First13 Approach

You won't find before-and-after photos in this program. Instead, every module includes a "Visualise It" section that paints a concrete, sensory picture of what life looks and feels like when you're living well. The worksheets help you connect the changes to your own values and your own life, because motivation that comes from within is motivation that lasts.

### 4. Behaviour Change Techniques Actually Work

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#### What the research says

Adding psychological techniques (cognitive-behavioural therapy, motivational interviewing, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) to standard diet and exercise advice significantly improves outcomes. Wadden et al. (2020, *The American Psychologist*, 467 citations) confirmed that behaviour therapy integrated with lifestyle advice leads to better long-term results. Hamer et al. (2024, *BMJ Open*) found the same.

#### The First13 Approach

First13 is built on the same behaviour change methods used in clinical practice by psychologists and dietitians. The module sequence mirrors a therapeutic approach: empathy first, education second, action third. The worksheets aren't tick-box forms. They're structured coaching sessions designed to help you discover what works for your life. And the entire program was co-created by an Accredited Practising Dietitian, so the nutrition science is rock solid.

## 5. Exercise Changes More Than Your Body

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### What the research says

Multiple studies by Annesi (2020, 2022, 2024) found that exercise predicts sustained weight loss not primarily through calories burned, but through a chain reaction: exercise improves mood, which improves self-regulation, which improves eating behaviour. This is a causal sequence, not just a correlation.

### The First13 Approach

First13 treats movement and nutrition as deeply connected, not as separate items on a checklist. The exercise modules (Weeks 10, 11, and 13) are deliberately placed after foundational nutrition and mindset work, building on the psychological groundwork laid earlier. Movement is framed as a tool for mood, confidence, and self-management, not just fitness.

## 6. Lasting Change Takes Time (and That's Normal)

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### What the research says

Successful weight maintenance involves ongoing psychological work: learning from lapses, adjusting strategies, and gradually shifting how you see yourself. Greaves et al. (2017, systematic review, 146 citations) found this to be central to long-term success. Hall et al. (2017, 635 citations) confirmed that ongoing support and counselling are essential.

### The First13 Approach

This is why the program is 13 weeks, not 4. The later modules focus on identity, resilience, self-esteem, and life balance, the exact psychological work the research says is needed for maintenance. The name itself, "The First 13," is a deliberate signal: these 13 weeks are the foundation for what comes next, not a quick fix with an expiry date.

## 7. The Whole-of-Life Approach Is the One That Works

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### What the research says

Programs that integrate nutrition, physical activity, and behavioural support together produce the best long-term results. Montesi et al. (2016, 315 citations) and Paixao et al. (2020, Obesity Reviews) both confirmed that successful maintainers use multiple strategies in combination, not any single intervention alone.

### The First13 Approach

First13 integrates nutrition, movement, mindset, and lifestyle into a single structured journey. It was co-created by Lane Edwards, an Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD), and draws on behaviour change science, motivational interviewing, and clinical nutrition. This isn't a nutrition course with exercise bolted on. Every module weaves all four dimensions together, because the research is clear: that's what actually works.

## What This Means for You

If you've tried diets before and they haven't stuck, the research suggests it's not because you lacked willpower. It's because those programs were missing the things that actually matter for long-term success: mindset support, self-regulation skills, flexible thinking, intrinsic motivation, and a structured approach that brings nutrition, movement, and psychology together.

The First13 program was designed from the ground up to include all of these elements. It's evidence-based, created by an Accredited Practising Dietitian, and structured to give you 13 weeks of guided, supported change, not just information, but real tools you can use.

**This isn't about being perfect. It's about building the skills, the mindset, and the habits that make lasting change possible.**

## Ready to Start?

The First13 program is a 13-week, fully online nutrition and behaviour change program. It covers nutrition, mindset, lifestyle, and exercise, all in one structured journey. Every module is designed by Accredited Practising Dietitians and grounded in the evidence you've just read about.

**Visit [food.com.au](https://food.com.au) to learn more and join the waitlist.**

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## Research References

The findings in this document are drawn from the following peer-reviewed studies, synthesised via Consensus AI. These papers have been cited thousands of times by other researchers and represent some of the most robust evidence in the field.

Authors	Journal	Year	Cites	Topic
Teixeira et al.	BMC Medicine	2015	639	Self-regulation mediators in obesity interventions
Hall et al.	Medical Clinics of N. America	2017	635	Ongoing support for weight maintenance
Wadden et al.	The American Psychologist	2020	467	Lifestyle modification for obesity treatment
Montesi et al.	Diabetes, Metab. Synd. & Obesity	2016	315	Multidisciplinary long-term maintenance
Greaves et al.	Health Psychology Review	2017	146	Psychological tension in weight maintenance
Grave et al.	Diabetes, Metab. Synd. & Obesity	2010	125	Lifestyle modification for metabolic syndrome
Paixao et al.	Obesity Reviews	2020	115	Weight control registry systematic review
Kheniser et al.	J. Clin. Endocrinology & Metab.	2021	92	Long-term weight loss strategies
Annesi (multiple)	The Permanente Journal	2016–22	Multiple	Exercise-induced self-regulation and eating
Lillis et al.	J. Behavioral Medicine	2021	7	ACT for long-term weight loss (RCT)
Hawkins et al.	Obesity Reviews	2024	6	Essential behavioural program components
Hamer et al.	BMJ Open	2024	7	Psychological interventions scoping review

View the full research synthesis: [consensus.app – Mindset and Lifestyle Weight Management](#)