



Healthier Options for Teenagers: Intervention for Change

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Research Question

Does a nutrition education program impact attitude, knowledge and food choice among Australian adolescents?

Background

- Adolescence to early adulthood is an important period for establishing healthy eating patterns, as this period often links to a decline in a quality diet ^[11].
- This is an opportunistic time to intervene to provide education and support to improve diet and long term health for adolescents ^[11].
- Data from 36 countries in a recent study reported that over 51% of adolescents ate fast food at least once a week ^[8].
- Being overweight or obese can be associated with problems with many areas including: physical and mental health, sleep reproductive function, self esteem and body image, as well as increase the risk for heart disease and stroke ^[6].
- In 2017-18, twenty five percent of children and adolescents were either overweight or obese ^[1].

Purpose

- This study aims to explore whether attitudes towards healthier food options are altered by a nutritional education program for one term at a co-education high school using Year 9-11 female and male students as participants.

GAP:

- There are inconsistent education programs on food in Australian schools that provide food-related skills and topics ^[7], limited trained teachers and poor knowledge on nutrition and food systems that young adults need to know for everyday healthy eating practices.
- There are limited studies on intervention programs in the area of nutrition, evidence supports that intervention is important to reduce future consequences such as obesity as these factors are strongly linked to obesity and diabetes in adulthood ^[4].



Intervention Program

- An intervention program similar to the program run by Refresh.Ed ^[3] on Exploring energy sources geared at Year 10 students was used, covering topics which include nutrition and energy sources, food sources, functions and proportions, research on disease, making informed decisions for healthier lifestyle choices, strategies to help the school and wider community on healthier food choices.
- This program was for one term, for one period a week and beneficial from full attendance, an engaging and informative program to help adolescents be able to make informed choices in regards to healthier eating.

Methodology

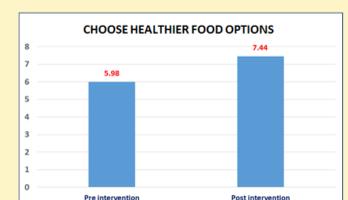
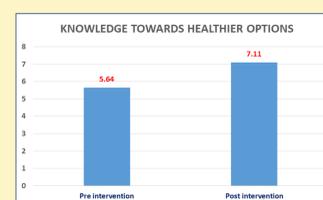
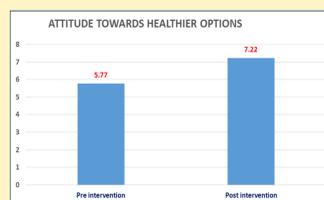
- The study is based on a quantitative, cross sectional research design.
- The sample size included 180 students, both female and male between the ages of 13-17. Students completed a survey online pre and post the intervention on knowledge and attitude towards fast food, the results were collated to evaluate the results.
- The survey was 35 questions with a combination of multiple choice, likert scales and one comment box to include suggestions on how to improve in making healthier food choices Survey was adapted for the purpose of this study from the 'Reliability of a dietary questionnaire on food habits, eating behaviour and nutritional knowledge of adolescents' ^[9].

Limitations:

- The sample size: was with one co-ed high school for Year 9 to Year 11 participants.
- The self-report nature of the measures is a limitation. It is assumed that participants will respond truthfully to the questionnaire, particularly for questions on fast food choices and influences towards purchases, this is not able to be verified.

Results

- A paired-sample t-test was conducted to evaluate the impact of the nutritional intervention program using the mean score.
- Following the education program, participants had an increase in nutritional knowledge which may be associated with a change in attitude towards selecting healthier options when purchasing food.
 - There was a statistically significant increase in Knowledge scores from Survey 1 (M = 5.64, SD = 1.32) to Survey 2 (M = 7.11, SD = 1.04), and p value = <.001.
 - There was a statistically significant increase in Attitude scores from Survey 1 (M = 5.77, SD = 1.07) to Survey 2 (M = 7.22, SD = 1.31), and p value = <.001.
 - There was a statistically significant increase in Choose Healthier Option from Survey 1 (M = 5.98, SD = .86) to Survey 2 (M = 7.44, SD = .87) and p value = <.001.



Conclusion

- This study showed that a brief nutritional education program for Year 9 to Year 11 students was associated with positive increases across attitude, knowledge and intentions to choose healthier food options.
- Results for this study will supplement existing research showing that a nutritional education program is an important part in educating adolescents to make healthier food choices.
- The program incorporated varied teaching methods of interactive, practical and skill based, as recommended by Nation et al. ^[5] for optimum results.
- A follow-up booster program before finishing high school could help reinforce the learning from this brief intervention program and explore has longer term impact on students.
- The influence of student age and gender on program outcomes requires further investigation.
- Findings from this study can assist in developing effective ways to educate adolescents about the role of good nutrition on leading a healthy life, and may reduce the adverse outcomes associated with being overweight or obese.

References:

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