

The Healthy Toddlers Curriculum

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INTRODUCTION

The Healthy Eating Index reports that only 36% of 2- and 3-year-old children consume a "good diet."¹ Nutrition education for parents can improve knowledge, parent-child interaction, and the serving of healthy food to young children.²

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Healthy Toddlers (HT) curriculum, a series of 8 weekly lessons available in English and Spanish, was designed to promote the development of healthy eating habits at an early age through effective nutrition and parenting education. Curriculum content was based on topics of interest to parents and research indicating that although most mothers knew that it was important to feed their children healthy food, they needed strategies and skills to help them accomplish this goal.³ Healthy Toddlers used a learner-centered approach,⁴ based on the Social Cognitive Theory,⁵ which addresses both cognitive and environmental influences on behavior. The curriculum was developed and field tested with 628 families over 3 years in Colorado, Michigan, and Wisconsin. The data gathered are in the process of being analyzed.

The HT curriculum emphasized the roles of mothers and toddlers during feeding; that is, mothers determine what the toddler is offered to eat and where and when he eats, and the toddler decides whether and how much he eats.⁶ Key concepts in lessons

were: child development related to Satter's division of responsibility;⁶ offering fruits and vegetables; limiting sweetened beverages; turning off TV during meals; routine meals and snacks; role modeling; preventing mealtime problems; picky eaters; and quick and easy meals.

Paraprofessional instructors from Colorado State University and the University of Wisconsin-Extension Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Programs, and Michigan State University Building Strong Families Program were trained to deliver the curriculum and teach the 8 HT lessons to participants (low-income mothers). Other adults in the home could be part of the lesson. Each 60- to 90-minute lesson was taught during a home visit. Lessons provided information about feeding young children (ages 1-3 years old), activities and discussion for learners to apply the information to their situation, food preparation/tasting, goal setting, and handouts with recipes. Lesson plans used the *anchor, add, apply, and away* learning task model based on Norris's *From Telling to Teaching*.⁷ For example, the first lesson started with the parent sharing examples of her child's development (*anchor*) and continued with instructors explaining the role of parents and children in the feeding relationship related to child development (*add*). The lesson included a sample situation to discuss application of this information in a nonthreatening way and discussion of challenges to applying the information (*apply*). Recipe tasting and time for questions and answers also

helped parents apply the lesson content. The lesson concluded with goal setting (*away*). The recurring cost to teach 8 lessons was approximately \$25 per participant, based on cost of food samples and educational materials.

IMPACT AND IMPLICATIONS

Results from the HT process evaluation included maternal (n = 62) and instructor (n = 9) self-reports of HT usefulness.⁸ Mothers particularly enjoyed the hands-on activities and preparing and tasting the recipes (n = 56; 91%). Mothers commented that the lessons were "very helpful" (n = 62; 100%) and that they tried to make changes, such as offering more vegetables (n = 54; 87%). Data from 3-day dietary records (n = 132) revealed a variety of vegetables offered and eaten improved in the intervention group compared to the control group ($P \leq .05$). Data from random exit interviews (n = 65) indicated that almost all participants agreed 8 weeks was an appropriate length of time for the lessons (n = 56; 87%) and the time to do each lesson was "about right," as was the lesson content (n = 65; 100%). All participants (n = 62) were very satisfied with the lessons and would recommend them to a friend. Instructors found the hands-on activities and handouts helpful in engaging low-income mothers from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds and indicated that the lessons appeared to lead to positive behavior change, such as mothers offering more vegetables and smaller portions to their children. The instructors liked how the lessons built on previous lessons and felt there was a good balance between the content and the recipes. They also believed 8 weeks was an appropriate length of time for the lessons.⁸

Healthy Toddlers, a theory-driven,⁹ accessible curriculum,¹⁰ can be delivered by health professionals, paraprofessionals, or others who work with families in their homes or with small groups.

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Errata

The July/August supplement issue of the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* included a poster abstract entitled Child Care Mealtime and Active Play Partnerships (Child Care MAPP) Web Site Provides Resources for Trainers (JNEB 2012; 44: S32). Susan L. Johnson, PhD, University of Colorado Denver, the last author, was inadvertently excluded from the author list.

The July/August supplement issue of the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* included a poster abstract entitled Examining the Effects of Activity Bursts and Pedometers in the Elementary School Classroom (JNEB 2012; 44: S46). The last 2 sentences of the abstract were truncated and should have read, "Time spent in physical education class and recess does not always satisfy these recommendations. The addition of regular activity bursts throughout the school day has been shown to increase physical activity as measured by pedometers."

The July/August supplement issue of the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* included a poster abstract entitled Regulatory Agency Consistency with Food Label Guidance (JNEB 2012; 44: S68). The third author's name was incorrectly reported as S. Venkates, MS. The third author's name is in fact S. Venkatesh, MS.