

What's new in prevention?

News on nutrition, physical activity and weight research

Prevention Research Centres Newsletter

Building solutions for preventing childhood obesity

The Prevention Research Centres have developed a new set of resources that provide up-to-date and solution-oriented information to guide the development and implementation of child obesity prevention strategies in NSW. This series of modules synthesises recent evidence of the effectiveness of interventions for preventing weight gain and promoting healthy weight among children and adolescents. The modules have been designed to meet the needs of relevant policy-makers, government agencies, area health service workers, non-government and community organisations, and health practitioners.



These modules, collectively named *Building solutions for preventing childhood obesity*, cover the following topics:

- Interventions to promote consumption of water and reduce consumption of sugary drinks
- Interventions to increase consumption of fruit and vegetables
- Interventions to reduce consumption of energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods
- Interventions to promote eating breakfast
- Interventions to promote family meals
- Interventions to promote physical activity in children (aged 5 to 12 years)
- Interventions to increase physical activity in adolescents
- Interventions to reduce sedentary behaviours

Look out for this resource coming soon on the COO website, <http://www.coo.health.usyd.edu.au>

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Reviewing evidence about effective interventions continues to be in demand. This edition of PRC news features a preview of the series of reports, *Building solutions for preventing childhood obesity*, which will be released soon. There is ongoing demand for evidence updates and new information to drive policy and programs, to the extent that the volume of reviews is out of proportion to the volume and range of intervention research studies. As you will see from the newsletter articles, our current research program seeks to span intervention and descriptive research, as well as products that support applying research findings to policy and practice.

Lesley King ★

Commentary: Sixth National Physical Activity Conference

Adrian Bauman

The conference "Be Active 07" was held in Adelaide between 13 and 16 October, 2007. It is the biennial physical activity conference that meets in conjunction with Sports Medicine Australia and the Injury Prevention Conference. This conference provided a forum for scientific exchange and discussions with physical activity policy makers.

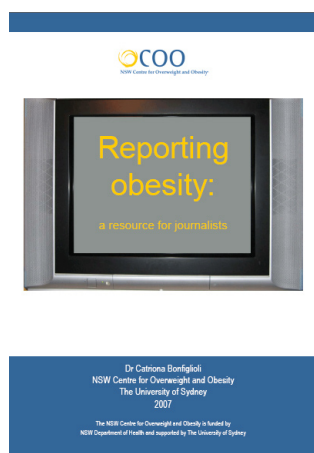
This year it was an excellent physical activity meeting with outstanding international speakers that provided breadth, insight and advocacy to our physical activity work. In particular, the presentations by Hans Brug from the Netherlands and Steven Blair from the University of South Carolina were noteworthy. They provided fresh PA advocacy perspectives, particularly around physical environments and their interaction with individual level factors, and from Steven Blair advocacy around the interaction between physical activity, fitness and obesity. Interesting discussions were also shared by David Buchner from the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta who spoke about promoting physical activity in the elderly.

A particular highlight of the meeting was scientific discussion about the role of sedentary time, as an independent risk factor for metabolic health. In other words the time that people spend sitting, independent of their other physical activity time during a 24 hour day, may contribute to poor metabolic health, particularly in terms of glucose and insulin metabolism. This innovative work will drive new areas of physical activity research, particularly focusing on decreasing sedentary time. This also has major ramifications for obesity prevention, where the overall aim is to increase total energy expenditure.

There was an interesting session organised by Trevor Shilton (Heart Foundation, WA) around policy making. Two Federal parliamentarians were able to present at the meeting, and an interesting discussion ensued. Both Kate Lundy, a Labour senator from the ACT, and Guy Faulkner, a Liberal senator from Tasmania, clearly understood the issues of physical inactivity and obesity and their health consequences, and provided different but quite supportive approaches in their talks.

We look forward to the next conference... which I think will be in 2009 in Brisbane.

Catriona Bonfiglioli



Obesity's rapid rise up the news media agenda has been crucial to obesity gaining the public attention it warrants. But media coverage can profoundly shape people's understandings of health issues, so it is more important

than ever to analyse how the issues relating to obesity are being presented. Analysing news coverage can inform strategies to encourage news portrayals which reflect current research and promote efforts to address obesity, thereby contributing to a more constructive public debate about solutions.

To this end, the NSW Centre for Overweight and Obesity's Media Project has used the findings of its analysis of television news and current affairs coverage of overweight and obesity to create a resource designed to encourage a broader kind of reporting by journalists.^{1, 2}

This resource, *Reporting obesity: a resource for journalists*, aims to translate the news media research into the practice of journalism. We aim to highlight current debates in relation to obesity as a health problem, point to evidence based research, suggest alternative news angles and illuminate the choices journalists can make in how they cover this topic.³

The resource has been developed in consultation with a review panel which included two nutritionists, a clinical obesity specialist, a professional medical writer and a health communication officer.

While it is aimed firstly at journalists, reviewers have commented that the publication's insight into the relationship between obesity research and news coverage will also be of value to public health professionals and other people interested in health communication.

In the resource, we provide background information on prevalence and impact of overweight and obesity, a briefing on the ways in which news shapes attitudes and health behaviours, a rundown of our media research findings, a discussion of the importance of environmental drivers of obesity which are not often emphasised in news coverage, and some ideas for fresh news angles journalists can investigate. We also debunk some of the myths of obesity.

Most crucially we have developed a list of about 50 names of people willing and able to be interviewed by journalists working up the fresh news angles particularly those which move beyond the clinical and address the structural and environmental issues in obesity. The enthusiastic support of these experts has made this project possible. Choosing who to interview for news stories shapes the news, so this contacts list could help reframe reporting to provide a greater emphasis on the structural and environmental causes and solutions.

References

1. Bonfiglioli C, Smith B, King L, Chapman S, Holding S. Choice and voice: obesity debates in television news. *Medical Journal of Australia* 2007;187(8):442-445.
2. Bonfiglioli C, King L, Smith B, Chapman S, Holding S. Obesity in the media: political hot potato or human interest story? *Australian Journalism Review* 2007;29(1):53-61.
3. Bonfiglioli C. 2007 *Reporting obesity: a resource for journalists*. Published by the NSW Centre for Overweight and Obesity at the University of Sydney's School of Public Health.

The resource and the associated contacts list are available on the COO website at:

http://www.coo.health.usyd.edu.au/pdf/2007_reporting_obesity.pdf

http://www.coo.health.usyd.edu.au/pdf/2007_media_contacts_list.pdf

Bridget Kelly



Food marketers are increasingly using new media, such as the Internet, to promote their products to children in captivating and innovative ways. Only five years ago, advertising on the Internet was virtually

non-existent; however since this time Internet marketing spend has rapidly grown to almost 15% of that spent globally on TV advertising.¹

Sixty-five percent of all children aged 5 to 14 years in Australia use the Internet, either at school or at home,² with many of these children frequent users. Children's most popular Internet activities include the use of online games, email and downloads; and food marketers have shrewdly honed in on these behaviours to market their products to children.

A recent analysis of Internet food marketing to children conducted by The Cancer Council NSW found that the majority of food product websites (e.g. www.coca-cola.com.au) use marketing features to capture children's attention, and that many of these techniques engage children for extended periods of time. (See Box)

Currently in Australia, there are no government regulations for Internet food marketing to children. Advertising industry self-regulations do exist;³ however these only cover paid marketing by a third party. Therefore, the content of food manufacturers' own websites is not included.

The lack of advertising regulations, together with children's increasing use of the Internet point to further investment in this form of marketing by food advertisers. Stronger regulations need to be implemented to prevent children's exposure to these powerful commercial messages.

Marketing techniques targeting kids

Advergaming:

where food products are integrated into online games. This may be in the form of the food product as game pieces, or the use of branded characters as mascots.

Kids' clubs:

a designated section of a website for children. Often these sections require membership registration, whereby food companies can obtain children's contact details for future marketing campaigns.

Branded downloadable items:

including ring tones, screensavers and colouring-in pages (for very young children!). These items extend the brand exposure beyond the Internet.

Viral marketing:

where children can invite their friends onto the website, including to compete in online games or blogs.

Advercation:

masquerading branded information as education material.



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1. World Health Organization, *The challenge of obesity in the WHO European Region and the strategies for response*, Branca F, Nikogosian H, Lobstein T, Editor. 2007, WHO Regional Office for Europe: Denmark.
2. Australian Bureau of Statistics. *Household Use of Information Technology, Australia, 2005-06*. 2006 [cited 09/10/2007]; Available from: [http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/B1A7C67456AE9A09CA25724400780071/\\$File/81460_2005-06.pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/B1A7C67456AE9A09CA25724400780071/$File/81460_2005-06.pdf).
3. Australian Association of National Advertisers. *Food and beverages advertising and marketing communications code*. 2006 [cited 09/10/2007]; Available from: http://www.aana.com.au/pdfs/FoodCode_Launch%20Version.pdf

Jimmy Louie



Consumers today are more aware of the nutritional quality of their diet. However, many consumers find the mandatory Nutrition Information Panel currently on packaged goods to be confusing and therefore do not use them well. As such a 'front-of-packet' labelling system, or 'signpost', has been advocated for in Australia.

Nutrient profiling has been proposed as a strategy to underpin such a labelling system, to help consumers easily identify the broad 'healthiness' of a food product. Nutrient profiling is 'the science of categorising foods according to their nutritional composition'.¹ Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ) have recently suggested that a Nutrient Profile Modelling System (NPMS) be introduced as a tool to assess the eligibility of a food product to carry a general or high level health claim². This type of system has application for front-of-packet labelling too.

A number of different nutrient profiling systems have been proposed, but the main approach being pursued in Australia uses a scoring system. In this system, a baseline score is assigned according to a food's negative nutrient contents, i.e. energy, saturated fat, total sugar and sodium. Points can then be subtracted from the baseline score if the food meets certain criteria for protein (P) and fibre (F) content as well as fruit, vegetable and nut content (FV&N). Thus the calculation can be expressed as:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Final Score} \\ &= \text{Baseline Points} - (\text{FV\&N Points}) \\ &- (\text{P Points}) - (\text{F Points}) \end{aligned}$$

The final score is the nutrient profile score of the food product and can be compared to specific cut-offs for what is considered 'healthy' and 'unhealthy'. It can also be used to rank foods. The original version of this NPMS was criticised for classifying most cheeses, which are 'core foods', as well as 'healthy' oils, e.g. olive oil, as 'unhealthy'. The modified system proposed by FSANZ addressed this issue by applying category-specific criteria.

The final score must, however, be translated into something which is easily understood by consumers. The use of a single 'traffic light' has been proposed, in which food products will carry a 'red, amber, green' traffic light, front-of-packet, label, informing consumers of the broad nutrient profile of the product.²

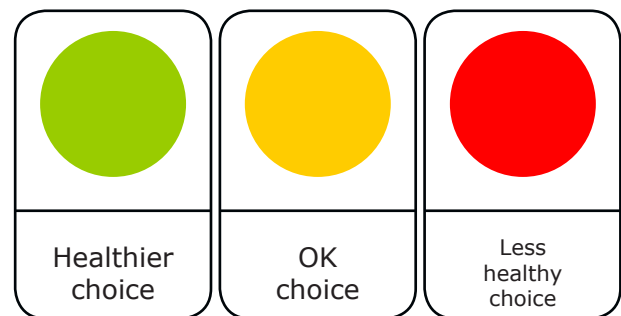


Figure 1 – Single Traffic Light

The nutrient profile modelling system has wider application, for example, to assess the healthiness of school canteen meals, take away foods and food services in area health services.

References

1. Scarborough P, Rayner M, Stockley L. Developing nutrient profile models: a systematic approach. *Public Health Nutr.* 2007;10(4):330-6.
2. Food Standards Agency. Food Standards Agency - Eat well, be well - Traffic light labelling. London: Food Standards Agency; 2006 [updated 2006; cited 2007 Aug 27]; Available from: <http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/foodlabels/trafflights/>

Physical education professional development for primary school teachers



In collaboration with the NSW Department of Education and Training (NSW DET), CPAH is conducting the process and impact evaluation of a 16-week pilot of a physical education professional development program for primary school teachers. The program was developed and delivered by a private provider and was piloted by the NSW DET among teachers in 10 primary schools in the Sydney South West Region during terms two and three of 2007. Teachers, who participated in the program, were followed up during term four 2007.

Munch and Move

Munch and Move is an intervention which aims to instil healthy eating and physical activity habits in young children within the preschool setting. Early childhood teachers will be given an opportunity to receive training in helping children develop fundamental movement skills through games and conducting fun activities to encourage healthy eating. COO and CPAH are working with the early childhood sector, Area Health Services and NSW Health to develop and implement the program across NSW and evaluate its effectiveness.



Physical activity and obesity counselling in general practice



Researchers from CPAH, COO, the Department of Health Sciences at Monash University and the National Heart Foundation are working together to look at general practitioners' knowledge, confidence, role perception and frequency of physical activity counselling for their patients. The study has collected data from a selection of New South Wales General Practice Divisions in 1997, 2000 and 2007.

Portion sizes of commonly consumed foods



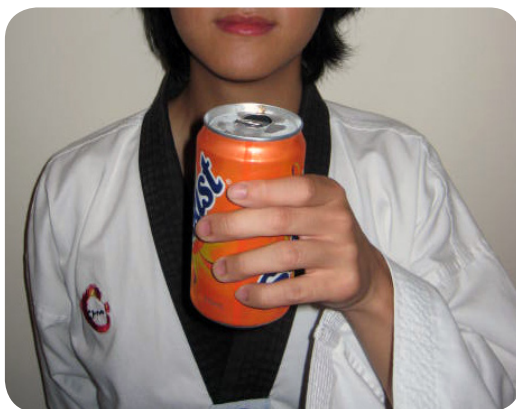
Information on portion sizes of commonly consumed foods by Australian adults and children is neither well documented nor readily available. This CPHN project will identify the most commonly consumed foods from the 1995 National Nutrition Survey database, the most recent nationally representative dietary survey, and report the median and inter-quartile ranges for both adults and children subgroups. This information will be useful for nutrition monitoring, research and education.

Consumption of 'extra' foods by adults

Following on from CPHN's previous work on the consumption of energy-dense, nutrient-poor or 'extra' foods in children, this project uses similar analyses to determine the contribution of 'extra' foods among adults. The 1995 National Nutrition Survey will be used to investigate specific types and quantities of 'extra' foods consumed by adults.



Reducing sugary drink intake among young adults



High consumption of soft drinks is independently associated with increased risk of obesity, and young adults are the highest consumers of soft drinks among Australian adults. This age group has proven difficult to reach with traditional health promotion approaches. The Prevention Research Centres are conducting focus groups with University of Sydney undergraduate students to explore their beliefs, understandings and behaviours about consuming soft drinks. These findings will be used to develop health promotion approaches targeting young adults.

Mums feel blamed for preschoolers who eat too much or won't touch a thing

Deanna Pagnini



Australian mums feel they are being unfairly judged for their preschoolers' eating habits and weight, a recent study by COO has found¹. This part of the *Weight of Opinion* study involved seven focus groups with mothers of 2-5 year olds, to listen to their views about factors related to childhood overweight and obesity.

The researchers found that mothers feel they are judged by how their children eat, and this makes them worried about their children's eating habits and weight. Mothers were well aware of the need to feed their children healthily and keep them active. However, they felt it was a battle to do so because of social pressures, financial constraints, food industry and supermarket promotions, and poor provision of play opportunities and practical advice.

The researchers also reported that many mothers worry about their children being underweight and not eating enough, and spend a lot of time trying to get them to eat more. There is a widespread cultural perception that it is better for a young child to be carrying a bit of 'extra weight' or 'puppy fat' than for them to be 'on the thin side'. Parents expect excess weight will just come off naturally as they grow, but we now know that that is usually not true.

The researchers suggest that parents should not worry about preschoolers eating enough, as encouraging children to eat more than they felt like, could stop them developing a natural self-regulation of appetite. In practice, this means that it is the parents' job to provide the food, but it is up to the child to eat what he or she feels like. This, in fact, is one of the messages covered in recent parent education DVDs and website information disseminated by The Raising Children Network: The Australian Parenting website (www.raisingchildren.net.au) and funded by the Australian Government.

Reference:

1. Pagnini DL, Wilkenfeld RL, King LA, Booth ML, Booth SL. (2007) Mothers of pre - school children talk about childhood overweight and obesity: The Weight of Opinion study. *J Paediatrics & Child Health*, published article online: 4 September doi: 10.1111/j.1440-1754.2007.01199.x.

COO researcher part of team awarded Healthy Active Australia Community and Schools Grant



Congratulations to Louise Hardy from COO, who worked with Klaus Stelter and Michael Russo from the St George Division of General Practice, and who have been awarded a Healthy Active Australia Community and Schools Grant. The grant will be used to implement and evaluate a short to medium term management program for overweight and obese young people and their parents, and to investigate the links to better health outcomes.