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Interesting shapes of vegetables: Is it a strategy to promote consumption among preschool children?

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Objectives: This study highlighted the low intake of vegetables among preschool children and determined whether changing the shape of vegetables increased their level of consumption. Vegetables are less desirable compared to more attractive unhealthy choices available to children, and discovering a strategy to promote vegetables is important. The aim of the study was to explore the effect of repeated exposure to interesting-shaped vegetables on consumption. The other aim was to determine the level of accessibility of vegetables at home and its influence on children's consumption.

Methods: This quasi-experiment compared the amount of consumption between different days and different vegetable shapes. Forty-two preschool children aged 2-5 years attending four different day care centers in London, Ontario, Canada were provided on the 1st day with natural-shaped vegetables (carrot, cucumber, sweet red pepper) to determine their baseline consumption of uncut vegetables. They were provided later with the same vegetables cut in interesting shapes (flower, star and owl/bat) with and without a preferred dip. On the 8th day of the experiment, the natural-shaped vegetables were provided again to determine how the interesting shapes influenced their consumption of the natural-shaped vegetables.

Results: The preschool children's consumption of natural-shaped vegetables increased by 10.5% on the final day of the experiment. Providing preferred dips with the vegetables did not increase their consumption of vegetables. Repeated exposure to interesting-shaped vegetables seemed to increase the preschool children's liking and consumption of vegetables and improved their eating experiences. Accessibility of vegetables at home did not have any effect.

Implications & Conclusions: With no recommended best approach to increase children's intake of vegetables, caregivers/parents or dietitians must find ways or adopt methods to influence positively children's consumption. There is a need to understand children's perception of vegetables and factors in their social and physical environments that influence their eating behavior.

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Current dietetic referral practices of primary care physicians – A literature review

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Obesity is multi-factorial and an important individual and population health issue as it contributes to a wide variety of chronic diseases, increases health care costs, and decreases productivity. Individualized nutrition counseling has been shown to be effective in aiding patients with weight loss. This literature review provides an insight on current dietetic referral practices of family physicians to prevent and manage obesity in primary health care settings. Databases searched include Scopus, Cochrane (Wiley), EMBASE, Science Direct, and PubMed. The search retrieved 302 articles among which 18 met inclusion criteria. Thirteen out of 18 articles stated that despite the need for nutrition counseling to reduce weight, there was no associated increase in dietetic referrals from family physicians (FP). Factors enabling dietetic referrals are: 1) working in a rural clinic ($P < 0.0005$), 2) being a female physician ($P < 0.05$), 3) patient having a higher body mass index (BMI), 4) patient who graduated college, 5) having more than 100 patients as these physicians were more likely to have a dietitian on site. Factors that disable dietetic referrals are: 1) not feasible due to limited access to a dietitian and cost of service, 2) not considered or not perceived as important by FP, 3) patient refusal, and 4) not required to record weight management interventions in the quality and outcomes framework. Minor disablers are 1) past treatment failed, and 2) contraindicated. Poor eating habits did not increase dietetic referrals as higher BMI did.

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