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FuelUp&Go!: Effectiveness of a food literacy program for low income adolescents to improve knowledge, attitudes and behaviors related to fruits and vegetables, sugar sweetened beverages and physical activities

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One in three adolescents in the US is overweight or obese. This is a serious public health concern as these adolescents are experiencing serious health conditions once only seen in adults. Adolescents are at a unique life style stage and are beginning to develop transitional decision making skills. Innovative food literacy programs that address decision making, promote the use of community based participatory methods and use engaging technology are needed. Low income, ethnically diverse adolescents 12-16 years old from Springfield, MA were recruited to participate in the FuelUp&Go! pilot. The program included focus groups and six in-person sessions. In addition, participants used a fitness tracker and app, received weekly text messages and visited the programs website. Twenty one participants attended the sessions and matched pre/post survey data were collected from nine. Overall, food related knowledge was low but increased slightly at post test (from 3.00 to 3.56 points out of 9 points). Attitudes toward fruits and water did not improve; however, attitudes toward vegetables, sugar sweetened beverages and physical activities trended positive. Participants' reported small increases in the number of days they engaged in physical activity. Overall, most program components were well received with a mean of 4.0 or greater (1=didn't like at all, 5=really liked a lot) including wearing a tracker, syncing the tracker, visiting the program website, receiving weekly tips and learning about food related topics. Phase two of this project will begin in January of 2016. Insight gained from the pilot will help inform the implementation of program components for phase two.

Biography

Catherine Wickham is a Doctoral Candidate and Research Assistant in the Nutrition Department at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, USA. Her research focuses on the intersection of technology, communication and nutrition education. She is a Registered Dietitian and obtained a MS in Nutrition from the University of Saint Joseph. She has taught courses in foodservice management, food preparation and food safety and has served as a Teaching Assistant for Dr. Elena Carbone at the Gustolab Institute, Rome, Italy. She has presented lectures on mhealth, the use of technology in diet assessment and obesity and has an extensive background in food service management.

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