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‘Cool dudes’ and African body-image – sports food and energy drink consumption in a sports-resource-deficient urban area in South Africa

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Nutritional supplements (sports food) are used by competitive and recreational athletes of all ages. These are often people in predominantly affluent communities, who can afford the cost of nutritional supplements. The situation is further exacerbated by the general pressure placed on certain groups to use supplements. Young sports participants who are engaged in developmental and competitive phases of sport, in particular, encounter peer pressure to use supplements and to enhance body image. As a consequence the supplement industry has grown to meet the increasing demand. Food movements on the other hand, are a growing and a diverse phenomenon globally. In South Africa, where the youth are the majority of large unemployed sector, job creation for youth in poor communities is a key development goal. Recently there is evidence of a socio-cultural shift where young people have become involved in urban food gardens. There is a high level of bodily awareness, often with less access to formal sporting facilities. Township youth may thus redirect their ideas of a good body-image into new urban food movements. These youth may consume sports food and energy drinks if they are able to purchase these items. The research objective is to explore the supplement and energy drink labels and other sources of information that influence purchasing decisions and trends that may contribute to the body-image aspiration, in the respective communities.

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Obesity prevention in preschool children: healthy caregivers-healthy children

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There is a need for pediatric nutrition based programs that target young children in an effort to reduce the obesity epidemic. Obesity in children, is associated with elevated cholesterol and elevated blood pressure and tracks from childhood to adulthood. Currently, the science needed to promote successful implementation of primary prevention practices, under naturally occurring conditions, is poorly developed. We describe here the outcomes of “Healthy Caregivers, Healthy Children (HC2)” an obesity prevention program with young children. A randomized controlled trial was conducted with 1101 children aged 2 to 5 years old. The intervention focused on three components to support and encourage cardiovascular health: environmental changes related to food consumption and physical activity in the centers, a classroom curriculum, and family and teacher education regarding healthy role modeling behaviors. The primary outcome was the child’s body mass index (BMI). At 6 months post-intervention, children in the intervention centers were significantly more likely to consume fresh vegetables fruits ($p=.006$) and vegetables ($p=.001$) as compared to the control centers. 91% of parents who increased buying vegetables had children whose BMIs either stayed the same or improved ($p=.01$), and 92% of parents who increased buying fruit had children whose BMI either stayed the same or improved ($p=.03$). The goal of this project was to develop and evaluate a multifaceted obesity prevention intervention, targeting low-income, multiethnic children aged 2 to 5 years. These findings support efforts to implement healthy weight programs in the childcare setting as a means of primary prevention.

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