Let’s Get Healthy with HENRY: Impact of a parent course upon parental self-efficacy, family dietary intake and eating behaviours

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Abstract

Background

One quarter of children in England are overweight/obese at school entry. We investigated the impact of a programme designed to provide parents of babies and preschool children with the skills required for a healthier family lifestyle.

Method

A cohort of families was followed across the eight-week course at nine locations in England. Pre-post course questionnaire data was available from 60 families (77.9% of those enrolling). Measures (including, eating behaviours, Food Frequency Questionnaire, self-efficacy) were completed at the end of the course and eight-weeks later, and analysed using RM ANOVA.

Results

Significant changes were observed, with most sustained at follow-up.

- Parents reported increased self-efficacy and ability to encourage good behaviour (p<.001).
- Consumption of fruit and vegetables increased in adults and children, together with reduced consumption of sweets, cakes and fizzy drinks (all p<.05).
- There were also positive changes in eating behaviours, including
  - increased frequency of family mealtimes
  - reduced frequency of eating while watching TV or in response to negative emotion (p<.01)
  - increased physical activity
  - reduced screen time (p<.005).

Discussion

The results build upon existing work, indicating that the HENRY intervention can help families of preschool children to adopt a healthier lifestyle. Furthermore, the findings suggest that positive changes inspired by the course can be maintained beyond its completion. Such changes may serve to protect against later obesity.