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Shifting adolescents' interest and motivation in health and healthy eating to promote a healthy and sustainable lifestyle

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Adolescents are a group to target with behaviour change interventions as they are developing their lifelong beliefs and behaviours that influence health into adulthood.⁽¹⁾ The aim was to assess whether students' interest and motivation in health and healthy eating would change after an 8-week co-design intervention about healthy eating, food waste, and recipe development. Interest and motivations were assessed using the previously developed Living and Eating for Health Segments.⁽²⁾ An 8-week co-design intervention was piloted in an independent school during Year 8 (age 13–14 years) Food Technology classes. Students were taught about food waste, as well as healthy eating and the Australian Dietary Guidelines,⁽³⁾ including the key food groups and why they are important. The co-design intervention involved students working in small groups to use leftover ingredients in the pantry to create a delicious meal suited to their needs. Students' needs from a recipe were identified early in the intervention through a co-creation activity that asked them 'what is important to you in a recipe?' They completed a pre-and post-intervention questionnaire and were asked to select a statement that reflected their interest and motivation in health and healthy eating. Previous research⁽²⁾ named the segments: Lifestyle Mavens (LM), Health Conscious (HC), Aspirational Healthy Eaters (AHE), Balanced All-Rounders (BAR), Contemplating Another Day (CAD), or Blissfully Unconcerned (BU). Forty students participated across both time points ($n = 21$ male, $n = 18$ female, $n = 1$ gender fluid). The co-creation activity identified factors that were important in their recipes such as preparation time, accessibility and cost of ingredients, allergens, difficulty level, sustainability, and healthiness. Overall, there was a change in students' interest and motivation in health and healthy eating across the intervention period. The proportion of LM increased from 7.5% to 17.5% of participants, HC doubled from 20% to 40%, AHE increased from 12.5% of the participants to 22.5% and BU increased from 0% to 2.5%. Both CAD and BAR had a reduction in participants across the intervention, with CAD going from 15% to 0% and BAR from 45.0% to 17.5% of participants. The pilot intervention focussed on food waste was successful in changing students' interest and motivation in health and healthy eating. Co-creating recipe criteria was helpful in understanding what adolescents value in recipes and indicated that they care about the healthiness and sustainability of their food. Students who were 'on the fence' in the Contemplating Another Day segment, were all shifted to other segments that had more of an interest in health and healthy eating. The intervention holds promise in promoting health and sustainability within the school environment and should be scaled up to test in different age groups and populations.

References

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3. National Health and Medical Research Council (2013) *Australian dietary guidelines*. Canberra: NHMRC. Available from: <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines-publications/n55>