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'All Salted?': Reducing salt intake in young parents and their children

There are around 50,000 young mothers under 20 in England. Young parents are disproportionately likely to come from disadvantaged backgrounds: they are more likely to have experienced poverty, to have been in care, to have educational problems (including low achievement, truancy and exclusion), to have been sexually abused, to have mental health problems or to have been involved in crime.⁽¹⁾

Because of poverty and social exclusion, young parents and their children are vulnerable to poor health outcomes.⁽²⁾

Young people often have unbalanced diets, typically high in salt, sugar and saturated fat and lacking in fruit and vegetables, and rely on convenience and fast foods.⁽³⁾

Although young parents receive standard advice on a healthy diet during maternity care, there are barriers that make it difficult to follow this advice: young women report not liking "healthier" foods, being unable to afford to buy them, and lacking the cooking skills or equipment to prepare fresh food.⁽⁴⁾

Reducing Salt Intake

In order to ensure that the salt reduction programme met the needs of the target group, young parents were consulted about their views on the project and the challenges they faced with regards to reducing salt intake. They confirmed the challenges identified above and also requested a session that looked specifically at salt and

baby food.

This project is being carried out from April 2007–April 2008. It addresses some of the above challenges by working with young parents and the practitioners who support them. An acceptable and practical salt reduction life skills and health programme was developed based on the consultation that was held with young parents.

The programme will incorporate key messages on reducing salt in their own and their children's diets, directly address the barriers young parents face to making dietary change, and enable them to make healthy food choices. It will help young parents to assess their own and their children's salt intake, to understand salt content information on packaged foods and to identify low salt options.

Most project sites completed the pilot in February 2008 and these will be evaluated and reported in the next issue of *Education and Health*.

References

1. Social Exclusion Unit, (1999). *Teenage pregnancy*. London, TSO.
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3. Food Standards Agency, (2000). *National diet and nutrition survey of young people aged 4-18 years*. London, TSO.
4. Burchett, H., & Seeley, A. (2003). *Good enough to eat? The diet of pregnant teenagers*. London, Maternity Alliance.