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'All salted?' Reducing salt intake in young parents and their children - Project summary

There are a range of factors that undermine attempts by children, young people and families to live a healthy lifestyle, including: the perceived and actual barriers of time, money, and access to healthy food; the relative cheapness of foods high in fat, sugar and salt; and the aggressive advertising and promotion of food and drinks high in fat, salt and sugar.

In response to this, the All Salted? Programme, funded by the Food Standards Agency, was developed and piloted by the National Children's Bureau in partnership with local voluntary agencies already engaged in supporting teenage parents. It was piloted during autumn 2007 and early 2008 in six areas in the Midlands and East and South East of England.

The programme aimed to:

- Raise awareness of the health impact of salt on adults and children
- Raise awareness of the barriers to reducing salt intake and strategies to overcome them.
- Introduce them to ways of assessing parents' own and their children's salt intake
- Demonstrate ways to reduce salt intake in everyday cooking and eating;
- Raise awareness of key health messages and provide accurate and consistent health information
- Enable parents to make healthy food choices
- Signpost them to further information and support

Parents filled in questionnaires before taking part in the programme and again afterwards to see how their knowledge of salt had changed. Parents and the trainers were asked to fill in feedback forms. Some of

the parents were later interviewed by telephone to see if there had been any longer term effects on their decisions with regard to buying and cooking food as a result of the programme. The practitioners who ran the course with parents were interviewed by telephone about their views on the content and delivery of the programme so that any improvements can be made before it is disseminated nationally.

The evaluation of the programme found that both the parents and trainers had found the All Salted? programme enjoyable and interesting. It had worked best when it had been used alongside cooking or healthy eating programmes rather than as a stand-alone programme. The parents who had taken part had been keen to do so largely because they wanted their children rather than themselves to have healthier diets.

Although the numbers of parents involved in the pilot All Salted? Programme was small, the findings suggest it was a particularly effective way of engaging and retaining the interest of young parents and communicating the key messages on reducing salt intake, such as the maximum recommended daily intake for adults and children, how to read labels, and that healthy food is not necessarily more expensive. Young parents enjoyed the practical activities, such as examining packaging, shopping and cooking and facilitators found it useful to incorporate the programme into existing healthy eating programmes.

A full report can be found here:

http://ncb.org.uk/Page.asp?originx_5524sd_97041412921663x16t_200862334z