

For nutrition info, moms like the Web best

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A Web site is a better source of information on nutrition than a video game or printed pamphlet, according to a study of low-income mothers reported in the January issue of the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*.

Led by Kami J. Silk, Ph.D., of Michigan State University, East Lansing, the researchers presented 155 low-income mothers with nutrition information in different formats. One group played a video game in which a series of entertaining activities were used to communicate nutrition facts. Other groups received the same information in a Web site format or a printed pamphlet.

Responses suggested that the mothers liked the Web site format best. They paid more attention to information presented on the Web site and understood it better. They were also more likely to say they would go back to the Web site for nutrition information, compared to the video game or pamphlet. "Nutrition literacy" scores were higher for women who viewed the Web site. On follow-up testing two weeks later, mothers assigned to the Web site were no more likely to retain the information than those who saw the other two formats.

Efforts to increase nutrition literacy among low-income families have focused on brochures and other printed materials. Video games seem to be a promising "edu-tainment" approach to communicating health information—the game holds the person's attention while communicating the health message.

However, the new results suggest that, when it comes to getting nutrition information, mothers prefer a Web site over a video game. The researchers were not surprised by the result: "[R]esearch suggests that Web sites are most often used for information, whereas games represent intellectual challenges."

While technology is not a "panacea" for health education efforts, "it can perhaps be argued that Web sites are a smart strategy in certain contexts and groups," Dr. Silk and colleagues write. Video games might be more successful in a younger audience, although this should also be confirmed by research. The researchers conclude, "Future interventions that integrate media need to consider how people use media in addition to what media they use."

Source: Elsevier

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