

Switch program increases kids' healthy eating, reduces screen time

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The Switch™ programme, 'Switch what you Do, View, and Chew', has been shown to be capable of promoting children's fruit and vegetable consumption and lowering 'screen time'. Researchers writing in the open access journal *BMC Medicine* tested the programme and report that it offers promise for use in youth obesity prevention.

Douglas Gentile, a psychology professor from Iowa State University, USA, worked with a team of researchers to evaluate the intervention in a group of 1,323 children and their parents from 10 schools. He said, "Reversing the pediatric [obesity epidemic](#) has been established as a critical priority. We tested Switch, a family-, school-, and community-based intervention aimed at changing the key behaviors of physical activity, television viewing/screen time, and nutrition".

The Switch programme features three components, Community, School and Family. The Community component is designed to promote awareness of the importance of healthy lifestyles using paid advertising (such as billboards) and unpaid media (such as letters to the editors of print publications). The School component reinforces the Switch messages by providing teachers with materials and methods to integrate key health concepts into the school day. Finally in the Family component, participating families receive monthly packets containing behavioral tools to assist families in altering their [health behaviors](#).

Gentile said, "Family components are critical for youth [obesity](#) prevention programs because parents directly and indirectly influence

children's activity and nutrition behaviors. Parents also influence the physical and social environments that are available to their children. The School and Community components are essential to integrate the programme into the places where families live, work and play".

The intervention yielded encouraging results, with the experimental group showing significant differences from the control group in both screen time and fruit and vegetable consumption. According to Gentile, "Although modest, these results are not trivial. The effects remained significant at the 6-month follow-up evaluation, indicating maintenance of these differences over time. Such maintenance may contribute to reduced weight risks in the future".

More information: Evaluation of a multiple ecological level child obesity prevention program: Switch what you Do, View, and Chew; Douglas A Gentile, Gregory Welk, Joey C Eisenmann, Rachel A Reimer, David A Walsh, Daniel W Russell, Randi Callahan, Monica Walsh, Sarah Strickland and Katie Fritz; *BMC Medicine* 2009, 7:49
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