

R U eating healthy 2day? New study highlights effectiveness of healthy lifestyle text messages for teens

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According to the Nielsen consumer research group, teens receive an average of 3,417 text messages per month (that's 114 texts per day!). Couple this with CDC's report that high school students' consumption of fruit and vegetables is, on average, 1.2 times per day (much lower than the recommended 5 a day) and it makes sense to start using text messages to inform teens about health. In a new study released in the January/February 2013 issue of the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, it was found that, in order to inform and motivate teens, text messages should address the reality of today's adolescent lifestyles.

The findings from this study were based on a one-year testing period involving 177 teens. During this year, researchers at the University of Arizona explored teens' preferences for message content, format, style (or message "voice"), origin, and frequency and mode of message delivery. From the pilot test of their [healthy lifestyle](#) text messages, the researchers found that teens liked an active voice that referenced teens and recommended specific, achievable behaviors sent from nutrition professionals.

According to study's lead author, Melanie Hingle, PhD, MPH, RD, University of Arizona, "The current consensus is that intervention programs targeting adolescents combat obesity with limited, short-lived success. The majority of traditional approaches employed to date have relied on expert-led fitness and nutrition education programs delivered

within the school setting. New approaches are needed to effectively engage teens in age appropriate, teen-centric, relevant activities that can be sustained beyond traditional health promotion settings. The ubiquity of [mobile phone use](#) among adolescents offers an engaging, youth-friendly avenue through which to promote healthy behaviors."

This study demonstrates a novel way in which to engage adolescents in "conversations" about health using a familiar communication method – that is in 160 characters or less!

More information: "Texting for Health: The Use of Participatory Methods to Develop Healthy Lifestyle Messages for Teens," by Melanie Hingle, PhD, MPH, RD; Mimi Nichter, PhD; Melanie Medeiros, MA; and Samantha Grace, BA, appears in the Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior, Volume 45, Issue 1 (January/February 2013)

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