

Social media app motivates users to exercise for longer

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A Facebook app aimed at encouraging exercise through peer group support and the use of pedometers has found participants in a pilot trial increase their physical activity by almost three hours a week.

The positive result of the UniSA trial will now see two apps being launched this month on Facebook to encourage mothers of young children, and adults in general, to take more steps in their daily routine.

Project leader, health scientist and recent Tall Poppy award recipient Dr Carol Maher (pictured below), and PhD student Jocelyn Kernot are now seeking recruits to trial the new apps, to determine the extent to which [social media](#) promotes healthy living.

Participants who register to use the apps will each receive a [pedometer](#) and will be encouraged to send invitations to friends to create small teams. Within the team, individuals will use pedometers and try to reach a target of 10,000 steps a day for a period of 50 days, recording their daily counts on the app.

Dr Maher described the apps, developed with Adelaide-based software development company, Portal Australia, as virtually unique in their ability to motivate people to exercise through the use social media, whilst catering to the individual circumstances of each participant's daily routine.

"Facebook has revolutionised the way people communicate and the site has more than 11 million Australians as members. To develop a program that can harness that influence and make a real difference to improving peoples' health is what we are aiming to achieve," Dr Maher said.

"The creation of teams to generate support and friendly rivalry and the ability to send and receive gifts as well as messages of encouragement – related to step performance, through using the app on the site, are powerful motivators encouraging [exercise performance](#).

"The results of the pilot trial saw participants increase their amount of exercise by 177 minutes each week, and the feedback to this was very positive."

Rachel Van Der Linden, who took part in the pilot trial, said the app and pedometer were great ways for new mums to keep fit.

"As a mum of a young child I found it difficult to exercise and with members of the mother's group we have all tried to do various things to encourage us to exercise more," she says.

"Using the app and recording our step count added a degree of friendly competition; at least you didn't want to be the mum who had recorded the least number of steps in a week, so it was motivating.

"It was also the subject of a lot of our conversations and within that peer group of other mums, it added focus; using the app made me want to exercise more and that made it easier to exercise, knowing that my performance would be noticed by others and that what I was achieving would be recognised.

"It probably doubled the amount of [exercise](#) I did in a week compared to what I was doing previously".

Dr Maher is now seeking 240 volunteers to take part in a new trial, using the new apps. One of the apps "Mums Step It Up" is designed to be used by mothers of babies under 12 months, while the Active Team app is for all adults.

Interested volunteers will also be able to find the apps within Facebook by typing "unisa active team" or "mums step it up" into the Facebook search bar.

Provided by University of South Australia

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