

Getting the health message via text

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

A text message providing support on just how hard it is to ditch junk food has resonated with participants in a WA study examining Generation Y's love affair with smart phones to promote a healthy lifestyle.

Digitally connected young people were interested in learning more about eating healthily but appeared to be confused about adopting a [healthy](#)

[diet](#) and lifestyle, lead researcher and Curtin University's Dr Christina Pollard says.

"This research identified that it is really important that we continue to find ways to provide information and motivate young adults to eat a nutritious diet," Dr Pollard says.

"[This is] so they are well equipped for the future, particularly as they become parents themselves."

They found substitution and empathetic [messages](#) that acknowledged the difficulty of changing behaviour or previous attempts to change resonated with female participants because everyone liked being acknowledged, encouraged, and supported for their efforts.

"This was a new finding, particularly for [junk food](#) where it seems that people are trying to change their behaviour and find it difficult," she says.

"For men, the authoritative messages were effective, particularly if coupled with information.

"Even though some men may have seen the tone as a little offensive, they liked that they were informative."

As part of the study, 39 Perth residents aged between 18 and 30 were quizzed on their perceptions of healthy eating and messages about fruit and vegetables, junk food and reducing their alcohol intake and then asked what type of message they wanted to receive (authoritative or empathetic).

The possibility participants would simply delete the message before reading it was not a concern, Dr Pollard says, but just in case they gave

them the option to unsubscribe from the service but very few chose that option.

The study has allowed health professionals to provide messages that acknowledged where that person was at in their life, Dr Pollard says.

"A 'one size fits all' approach to [healthy eating](#) communications is unlikely to work, we need to choose messages based on each specific nutrition behaviour and be mindful of the target audience," she says.

The study demonstrated the complexity of developing motivational nutritional messages for young adults, she says.

"These findings reveal the importance of considering the tone and content and pretesting messages for health promotion [text message](#) interventions," she says.

She says in the future, this type of program could be delivered by other health authorities who engage in education and promotion to the public.

More information: Christina Mary Pollard et al. Preferred Tone of Nutrition Text Messages for Young Adults: Focus Group Testing, *JMIR mHealth and uHealth* (2016). [DOI: 10.2196/mhealth.4764](https://doi.org/10.2196/mhealth.4764)

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