

Food-focused phone apps help families

September 25 2020



Credit: Pixabay

Ensuring healthy family meals can be greatly helped by mobile phone apps, mainly due to the appeal of the best apps' time-saving qualities for busy parents, according to Flinders University experts.

"Meal planning apps and features promoting organization present feasible, time-saving solutions that support healthy food provision practices," says nutritionist and dietitian Professor Rebecca Golley.

This will be the focus of the next BRAVE public lecture presented by

Flinders University that highlights pivotal research being undertaken at the university. Her session—"Thinking outside the (lunch)box: Getting better nutrition onto kids' plates"—will be livestreamed via the Flinders University website at 6pm on Tuesday 29 September.

As the "Better Lives Theme Lead" at Flinders' Caring Futures Institute, Professor Golley is focused on investigating prevention obesity in childhood and promoting nutrition, and she believes examining the effectiveness of food apps is one means of helping parents and other caregivers to improve children's diet quality.

The latest Flinders University research on food-focused phone apps—"Mobile apps to support healthy evening meal provision in working families: a feasibility study," by Rebecca Golley, Anthony Maeder, Ivanka Prichard, Rachel Laws and Chelsea Mauch—found that the incorporation of automated planning-related features (such as generating meal plans and shopping lists from recipes) ensure that apps have a wider application and do not add to the time burden of food provision.

Health meal phone apps are being researched by Flinders University Caring Futures Institute researchers Professor Golley, Chelsea Mauch, Dr. Rachel Laws, Dr. Ivanka Prichard, Dr. Tom Wycherley and Professor Anthony Maeder.

"The behavior change potential of food provision apps may lie in their ability to be integrated into everyday life, promoting healthy food provision in swift time and an easy context," says Professor Golley.

For the study, five apps were tested over four weeks by 62 families, and the results found that families prioritize time-saving strategies and healthy recipe content in their quest to achieve healthier family meals.

The most effective apps provide simple and fast recipes that are acceptable to families of young children, and are accompanied by appealing, high-quality images of the dish to entice participants and gain their trust.

Planning features such as meal planners and shopping list generators help families to save time. However, participants in the study still weighed up outcomes gained from the apps such as time-saving against the effort involved in using them when determining the acceptability of apps and app features.

"Apps that require lots of user input are not well accepted," warns Professor Golley.

This report, supported by a Flinders Foundation Health Seed Research Grant, has led to an externally funded project with a start-up company that will investigate a web-based app using the methodology used in the Flinders Foundation grant.

This research forms an important plank in helping to establish healthier eating patterns and good dietary habits among children, to prevent negative health and development outcomes during childhood and later in life.

Current estimates suggest that only 5% of Australian children consume the recommended serves of vegetables each day and over 30% of children's energy intake comes from unhealthy sources.

Professor Golley is currently contributing to a national project and new free toolkit: VegKIT for educators, health professionals and agencies, and is researching the potential efficacy of using digital platforms to disseminate nutritional information.

Supported by Hort Innovation through \$4 million in R&D funding, the five-year VegKIT project will deliver a free toolkit for educators, health professionals and research agencies that includes information on dietary guidelines, and evidence-based knowledge of flavor exposure and food preference.

Delivered through a collaboration between Flinders University, CSIRO and Nutrition Australia, the project will investigate the influencers behind kids' exposure to, and acceptance of vegetables through behavioral and produce innovations.

More information: Alison Spence et al. Childcare Food Provision Recommendations Vary across Australia: Jurisdictional Comparison and Nutrition Expert Perspectives, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2020). [DOI: 10.3390/ijerph17186793](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17186793)

Provided by Flinders University

Citation: Food-focused phone apps help families (2020, September 25) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-09-food-focused-apps-families.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--