

Active screen time: New children's app promotes healthy eating, exercise

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A Cornell University researcher and colleagues have developed a series of free, evidence-informed apps for preschool-aged children to encourage healthy eating behaviors and exercise.

A majority of parents said the apps helped their children try [new foods](#) and raise their activity level, according to a study published in the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*.

"Screens aren't going away," said Laura Bellows, associate professor of nutrition. "We want to substitute for sedentary screen time and give children active screen time instead."

Adults can download the set of four distinct apps—collectively known as Foods and Moves—from the Apple app store and Google Play. Using the apps, children guide a half-dozen cartoon monsters and four animated human preschoolers to try new foods and boost their indoor activity.

Together, the Foods and Moves cast encourages children to try new foods and supports the [building blocks](#) for such age-appropriate movements as hopping and skipping. The goal is to promote [physical activity](#) and introduce new food- and movement-based vocabulary.

"We intentionally developed the apps to help parents engage their preschoolers in food and movement activities," said Bellows, citing feedback from parents living in places where outdoor play can be constrained by weather or safety considerations.

"Parents on the team agreed we needed to provide multiple ways to use the apps that fit into [daily life](#)," said Bellows. "The apps can be done together or while we're doing laundry, making dinner. I can feel good putting this on for seven minutes—I'm not just putting my preschooler in front of a TV show."

In the study, most parents observed that their children continued playing the apps in the year after they were introduced, and 80% of [parents](#) said they were likely or very likely to recommend the apps to other families.

More information: Ligia I. Reyes et al, Engaging Preschoolers in Food Tasting and Movement Activities Using Mobile Applications, *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jneb.2022.08.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2022.08.002)

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