

TOP GRUB – Making healthy eating child's play

Childhood obesity is currently a major concern, with the national prevalence tripling over the past two decades. In the East of England 22% of boys and 27% of girls aged 2-15 are overweight or obese.

There are a number of contributory factors including physical inactivity and poor diet. Obesity is also linked to many diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and cancer and decreases life expectancy by up to nine years.

Dr Raj Lakshman, a public health doctor and paediatrician who lives in Cambridge, wanted to find a fun way to teach children about nutritional values of different foods to encourage them to make healthy choices. The result was Top Grub, a card game based on the popular children's game.

The idea was then developed by Health Enterprise East (HEE), the NHS Innovations hub for the East of England. Robert Donald, HEE Innovation Manager said: "Top Grub is a great way for children to learn food facts in an easily accessible way. It's very important for children to choose a healthy diet and physical activity in order to live a healthy life. Starting early is key".



The innovation

Top Grub comprises 33 full-colour cards, contained in a box, each featuring a different food, with nutritional values in terms of fat, sugar, salt, protein, fibre and calories. Each card also contains a fun fact about the food featured.

Dr Lakshman says: "My intention in developing Top Grub was for children to have lots of fun and learn what different foods contain. The foods chosen in this game reflect some of the favourite choices of boys and girls of primary school age. Encouraging children to read and understand food labels is important in helping them to choose a healthy and balanced diet".

The game was launched by international sprinter and sports celebrity, Tyrone Swaray at Teversham Church of England Primary School



Making healthy eating fun, left to right: Michael Read, Head Teacher at Teversham Church of England Primary School; Debbie Olaifa; Rama Lakshman; Dr Raj Lakshman, inventor of Top Grub; Tyrone Swaray; Robert Donald, Health Enterprise East; Ashley Reid; Luke Darcy and Dr Celia Duff, Deputy Regional Director of Public Health.

The partnership

HEE has met the development and manufacturing costs for Top Grub and is now supporting the pack being evaluated in schools in the Cambridgeshire region. Headteachers have been contacted to ask if they would be interested in participating in the study to assess if Top Grub improves children's knowledge and understanding about the nutritional content of commonly consumed foods and whether this can help them make healthy eating choices.

This will involve all participating schools delivering 'healthy eating' lessons for Years 5 and 6 during the Summer term 2007. A total of 40 schools have been selected and assigned to an Intervention Group or a Comparison Group.

Schools in the Intervention Group will receive a lesson plan and 20 packs of the Top Grub card game with instructions on how the game is played. These schools will be expected

to encourage children to play the game at least three to five times in school or at home and incorporate the cards in their teaching, commenting on its usefulness.

Those in the Comparison group will deliver the healthy eating lessons they have planned for the term, using the 20 packs of cards and lesson plan after the study is completed so they can have them for future use.

Schools will have to ensure that all Year 5 and 6 pupils fill in a short quiz aimed at assessing knowledge about healthy eating both before and after the lessons are delivered.

Organisations supporting the study include Cambridgeshire PSHE Service, East of England Regional Public Health Group, MRC Epidemiology Unit and HEE.

Update

In addition to trialling the cards in collaboration with the Cambridgeshire PSHE service, HEE is also currently looking for companies interested in either sponsoring the production of these cards or for a games company to manufacture and distribute them.

Once the pack is commercialised, HEE will market these cards UK-wide. There are many possible uses apart from schoolchildren, including mental health workers using them during their delivery of education programmes on healthy eating.

If you are interested in purchasing a set of Top Grub cards, please contact HEE on 01480 364925 or email: Maggie.lewis@papworth.nhs.uk



Have you got a bright idea to improve healthcare delivery? If so contact us today!

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