



Implementing Improved Snack Quality in After-School Programs

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OBJECTIVES

Consumption of fruits and vegetables (FV) is linked to reduced risk for disease and the prevention of overweight and obesity. Provision of FV may increase consumption in children. After-school programs are one place to provide healthful FV snacks to children. The success of a healthy snack intervention may be influenced by implementation. The purpose of this study was to understand factors that influence implementation of a healthy snack that includes a serving of FV in after-school programs.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were staff from four intervention after-school sites randomized to receive the Healthy Opportunities for Physical Activity and Nutrition (HOP'N) After School program. Staff attended three trainings each year over the two academic years and were given the goal to increase FV snack offerings. Organizational leaders, after-school elementary school site program managers, and 4th grade group leaders participated in the study in year 1 (n= 20) and year 2 (n=17).

PROCEDURES & DATA ANALYSIS

Structured interviews were conducted at the end of each HOP'N intervention year by a trained interview facilitator (lead author). Participants were asked to describe the after-school snacks; their perception of snack changes, if any; their role regarding changes to the snacks; and barriers/facilitators to snack changes. Interviews were transcribed, checked for errors, and imported into QSR NVivo software. A coding guide was developed to assist in the coding process. One independent coder was trained, and inter-rater reliability was high.

TABLE 1 –BARRIERS & FACILITATORS: MAJOR THEMES AND ILLUSTRATIVE QUOTES

Variable	Participant Quotations
Perceived positive snack changes	"Snack has been much better now than it used to be, we're starting to get fresh FV more often, and we're not getting donuts and cookies."
Barriers	
Cost	"The problem is money... because if you have cut-up fruits & vegetables it is a labor issue of cutting the apples or else buying prepared food that is in little packages."
Lack trust of after-school staff	"I'm requested for healthier snacks, but when my equipment has been abused, from having my pans ruined due to glitter to having the lid to my milk cooler destroyed, trust is getting lost and it's hard to gain back. So I go to a simple simple snack."
Snack not a priority	"Snack, as long as they get fed, because I go over budget on the snack... it is just an expense to me."
Facilitators	
Requesting healthier snacks	"We've requested no more donuts and the lunch lady doesn't supply donuts anymore."
Encourage healthy snacks received	"She'll give us oranges, and I'll be like, 'the kids really liked the oranges', and then for like a week and a half we'll get oranges all the time."

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Most staff perceived positive snack changes during the two-year HOP'N program at their sites. Staff perceived fewer offerings of donuts or cinnamon rolls, less sugary foods, more reduced fat milk, more granola bars, and more FV. However, some organizational leaders reported that the improvements were the result of the food service at each school, and not due to their efforts. The four-week snack menu was supposed to be the same at each site. However, baseline observational data did not support this (Coleman et al., 2008). Furthermore, interviews corroborated baseline data, indicating that there was wide variability in snack offerings. In both years, all participants reported that the goal of FV being offered at every snack was not met.

There were several barriers and facilitators to implementing improved snack changes. Barriers included: cost, lack of trust in after-school staff, and low priority of snack. Facilitators included: requesting healthier snacks, and encouragement for healthy snacks received from school food service.

CONCLUSIONS

Changes must be made at the school district level and the after-school site level to improve the quality of after-school snack. In addition to school district policy changes, relationships must be established between after-school staff and the food service personnel at the after-school site. After-school programs need to offer healthy snacks to decrease caloric intake and potentially prevent obesity in children.



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