

ShowCase

Food Dudes

Topic: Nutrition

Organisation: Bangor University

Location: Europe; USA

Dates: February 1992 to ongoing

Website: www.fooddudes.co.uk

Contact: Professor C Fergus Lowe

Email: c.f.lowe@bangor.ac.uk

Telephone: 01248 382210



Overview

Food Dudes is an evidence-based programme designed to improve children's consumption of fruit and vegetables. It has been shown to be consistently effective at changing the eating habits of 4- to 11-year-olds. The programme comprises three key elements:

- DVD adventures featuring hero figures, 'Food Dudes', who like fruit/vegetables and provide social models for children to imitate
- Small rewards to ensure children begin to taste new foods
- Repeated tasting of fruit and vegetables so that children develop a liking for these foods

Food Dudes letters and home packs provide ongoing home support to ensure the behaviour change transfers from school to family and is maintained over time.

Results:

- Large and sustained increases in fruit and vegetable consumption
- Greatest increases in consumption among poorest eaters
- The programme works for all children aged 4 to 11 years
- The effects generalise across contexts (i.e. school to home)
- The programme is equally effective for boys and girls
- Effects are highly reliable, regardless of school location and social deprivation

1. BEHAVIOUR

- To increase fruit and vegetable consumption amongst primary-aged children (in accordance with the Government's 5-a-day guidelines)
- For parents to support their child's acceptance of fruit and vegetables
- For teachers to support their pupils' move towards healthier eating choices

2. CUSTOMER ORIENTATION

- Extensive research by the Bangor Food and Activity Research Unit identified the key psychological factors influencing children's food choices
- Two trial studies with children (aged 2 to 6) conducted in homes, schools and nursery settings
- Procedures and materials, including videos and educational materials, were pretested with primary school children

3. THEORY

- **Reinforcement Theory:** Using rewards and positive role models to encourage tasting
- **Taste Acquisition Theory:** Using repeated tasting to encourage new foods to be liked

4. INSIGHT

- Children are motivated by praise, recognition and rewards
- Positive role models have a powerful influence over children's learning and value systems
- The traditional approach of telling children what to do and what to eat is unsuccessful
- Language locks in specific behaviours through the process of categorisation

5. EXCHANGE

Barriers:

- Poor support for healthy eating in home and schools
- Low profile or availability of fruit and vegetables, compared to less nutritious, heavily marketed alternatives

Benefits:

- Food Dudes video is a fun experience to share with friends
- Rewards for good behaviour makes participation fun
- Children come to see themselves as 'fruit and vegetable eaters' and are proud of this new identity
- Children gain kudos and self-confidence from being able to succeed on the programme

6. COMPETITION

- Brand allegiance to unhealthy foods – Created competitive 'Food Dudes' brand
- Peer pressure against healthy eating – Brought key school influencers on board
- Taste of sweet or fatty foods – Repeat tasting to develop liking for fruit and vegetables
- Other Government fruit and vegetables initiatives

7. SEGMENTATION

Primary audience

- Primary school children aged 4 to 11

Secondary audiences

- Teachers
- Parents, carers and relatives

8. METHODS MIX

- DVD, featuring Food Dudes superheroes
- Food Dudes letters/emails
- Small rewards, e.g. pencils, stickers, pedometers, certificates
- Home pack, to encourage fruit and vegetable consumption at home through involving parents
- Education support materials for teachers to use in class