

Project description “The World of the Veggiesfruities”

The World of the Veggiesfruities is a Dutch health intervention program stimulating young children to taste and eat more fruit and vegetables. The intervention is based on academic research and developed at the Radboud University Nijmegen with support from the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) and the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS).

Worldwide the number of overweight children is still rising. One way to prevent overweight is by creating healthy eating habits from a very young age, when food attitudes and preferences are being developed that often last into adulthood.

[The world of the] Veggiesfruities stimulates children younger than 7 to eat more fruit and vegetables by making this behavior instantly fun through storytelling methodologies. Specifically, a group of animated animal characters (the Veggiesfruities) who love to eat fruit and vegetables come to life in stories. The aim of these stories is threefold: communicating the key message that eating fruits and veggies is fun and relevant, building friendships with the characters, and stimulating imitation behavior (eating fruit and vegetables).

The program consists of picture book reading in class or at home, followed by fruit and vegetable tasting. It is currently being used among preschoolers on primary schools. A toddler version for daycare is anticipated to be implemented in the fall of 2015.

Veggiesfruities is a research-based health intervention program based on five scientifically proven principles: (1) appealing characters that fit well with the fruit and vegetables they promote, e.g., Rabbit likes carrots and Monkey likes bananas, (2) active child involvement during readings of these characters' adventures by asking children questions about the story, (3) health messages that are relevant to young children, e.g., instead of 'healthy' the characters become strong or fast from eating fruit and vegetables, (4) bonding with the characters through repeated exposure, thereby stimulating imitation, and (5) repeated fruit and vegetable tastings.

For more information on these principles, see: De Droog, S. M. (2013). Establishing and explaining the impact of characters on young children's healthy food choices. From: <http://dare.uva.nl/record/445573>

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