

2nd Behaviour Change Conference: Digital Health and Wellbeing
www.ucl.ac.uk/behaviour-change/CBC_Conference_2016

ABSTRACT

**Development and preliminary evaluation of the Child Feeding Guide website and app:
A tool to support caregivers with promoting healthy eating in children**

Dr Emma Haycraft¹, Dr Gemma Witcomb¹ and Dr Claire Farrow²

¹ School of Sport, Exercise & Health Sciences, Loughborough University, UK

² School of Life and Health Sciences, Aston University, UK

Background: Fussy eating in young children is very common, with at least 50% of parents reporting having a fussy child. Eating behaviours established early in life tend to remain throughout childhood and into adulthood, so ensuring that children develop healthy eating behaviours from their earliest years is vital. Fussy children often refuse to eat healthy foods, like fruit and vegetables, but favour high-calorie foods instead. Diets low in fruit and vegetables have been linked to a number of preventable health conditions, such as diabetes and cancers, as well as to overweight and obesity. Fussy child eating behaviours can also cause anxiety and stress in caregivers, which can perpetuate the problem. Despite an abundance of available support for introducing complementary foods, practical advice about child feeding once weaning has occurred is lacking. Moreover, caregivers find available resources about feeding young children and promoting healthy eating to be “too basic” and have called for evidence-based, credible resources to help them manage children’s difficult or fussy eating behaviours. Empowering caregivers to effectively manage fussy eating behaviours and improve health in their children will likely prevent these eating behaviours from becoming engrained and reduce the number of children eating unhealthy or limited diets.

Aim: To address the lack of child feeding support for caregivers by developing an evidence-based, credible and accessible support resource to promote healthy eating habits in young children and healthy feeding practices in caregivers.

Method: Following a review of the literature and consultation with caregivers, the Child Feeding Guide was developed. The Child Feeding Guide is a website and free mobile app which offers information, advice and tools to help caregivers manage fussy eating behaviours. An online format was used to ensure the Child Feeding Guide is accessible and that a diverse range of caregivers can benefit from it. Health professionals and caregivers with young children were asked to use the newly-developed Child Feeding Guide and provide feedback on its usability, content, appearance and novelty.

Results: Over 85% of health professionals agreed that the Child Feeding Guide contains useful information, is a beneficial resource, and is easy to use. 95% would recommend it to the families that they work with. 80% of caregivers reported that using it helped them to better understand their children’s eating behaviour. Caregivers commented that using the Child Feeding Guide had made them aware of how their feeding behaviours can inadvertently affect their child. Other features of the Child Feeding Guide were identified as beneficial, such as: the provision of advice alongside practical and realistic methods for improving mealtimes; tips for not using food for rewards or for comfort; information on common feeding pitfalls. Caregivers also reported finding the Child Feeding Guide novel, interesting and educational, and easy to use.

Conclusions: Preliminary user feedback suggests that the Child Feeding Guide is filling a critical gap in available support resources. Caregivers and health professionals report that it is easy to use, helpful and accessible. While initial user testing of the Child Feeding Guide confirms its value, further formal testing of this resource is required prior to wider-scale roll-out.

Key words:

Child feeding; obesity prevention; parents/caregivers; healthy eating behaviours; intervention