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INCREASING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF VEGETABLE AND FRUIT BREAKS BY AUSTRALIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A NON-RANDOMIZED CONTROLLED TRIAL IN A POPULATION OF SCHOOLS

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Introduction: Limited evidence exists describing the effectiveness of strategies in facilitating the implementation of vegetable and fruit programs by schools on a population wide basis. The aim of this study was to examine the effectiveness of a multi-strategy intervention in increasing the population-wide implementation of vegetable and fruit breaks by primary schools and to determine if intervention effectiveness varied by school characteristics.

Methods: A quasi-experimental study was conducted in primary schools in the state of NSW, Australia. All primary schools in one region of the state (n=422) received a multi-strategy intervention. A random sample of schools (n=406) in the remainder of the state served as comparison schools. The multi-strategy intervention to increase vegetable and fruit breaks involved development and provision of: program consensus and leadership; staff training; program materials; incentives; follow-up support; implementation feedback. Comparison schools had access to routine information-based Government support. Data to assess the prevalence of vegetable and fruit breaks were collected by telephone from Principals of the intervention and comparison schools at baseline (2006-2007) and 11-15 months following the commencement of the intervention (2009-2010).

Results: At follow-up, prevalence of vegetable and fruit breaks increased significantly in both intervention (50.3% to 82.0%, $p < 0.001$) and comparison (45.4% to 60.9% $p < 0.001$) schools. The increase in prevalence in intervention schools was significantly larger than among comparison schools (OR 2.36; 95% CI 1.60-3.49, $p < 0.001$).

Conclusions: The findings suggest that a multi-strategy intervention can significantly increase the implementation of vegetable and fruit breaks by a large number of Australian primary schools.

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