

Original Article

ACTIVATE: A childhood overweight prevention initiative

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ACTIVATE was initiated in 1999 by the International Food Information Council (IFIC) Foundation and the International Life Sciences Institute Center for Health Promotion. Extensive qualitative research was conducted to help understand consumer beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions about preventing overweight, specifically overweight in childhood. ACTIVATE then used the research findings to develop potential avenues for communicating obesity prevention messages.

The research, conducted with children and their parents, consisted of three progressive phases of focus groups, with each building on information obtained from the previous phase. The findings suggest the need for parents and children to work together to address the obesity prevention issue, as well as the need for effective tools to facilitate this conversation. Parents need to learn how to talk about eating and exercise habits with their children in positive and encouraging ways and how to help sustain their child's involvement in eating healthily and staying physically active. Children themselves need direct messages to motivate them to change their exercise and eating habits, as well as tips on partnering with their parents to achieve fitness goals. Children and parents both stated that positive and realistic approaches to getting fit that seem achievable and accessible would be of great help in their efforts. Both groups considered ongoing encouragement and 'small victories' to sustain involvement in getting fitter to be critical factors to success. Children and parents are also looking for support and customized information to help them in their efforts.

ACTIVATE responds to the critical need for comprehensive obesity prevention initiatives. It is a communications program designed to help children and their families achieve healthy lifestyles through regular physical activity and good

nutrition. ACTIVATE promotes sound nutrition advice by emphasizing that healthy eating is based on the overall diet, not any one food or any one meal. The message that all foods can fit into a healthy diet when consumed in moderation is an integral piece of ACTIVATE. Being physically active is equally as important as eating well, and various ways to incorporate activity into children's lives are emphasized. Particular attention is placed on making physical activities fun, enjoyable, and sustainable.

ACTIVATE is also a unique partnership. The IFIC Foundation is working closely with several organizations to develop ACTIVATE's program elements and to extend ACTIVATE's reach. These partner organizations are the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAPP); the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM); the American Dietetic Association (ADA); the International Life Sciences Institute Center for Health Promotion (ILSI CHP); and the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). In addition, ACTIVATE is advised by individual experts in physical activity, nutrition, family medicine, and child psychology.

Currently, the IFIC Foundation and its partners are using the research findings to develop ACTIVATE's customized program elements – program elements that will deliver positive, balanced information on physical activity and nutrition to help families achieve healthy lifestyles.

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