

Title

Trim Tots

Short description

The Trim Tots healthy lifestyle programme has been developed by a team from the Institute of Child Health in London together with a team of community artists, experienced in delivering educational art workshops to young children. The focus is on prevention rather than treatment of obesity. The aim of this evidence based community programme is to promote a healthy lifestyle both in pre-school children, aged between one and five, and their carers. The intervention is delivered in Children's Centres as one two hour session per week over a 24 week period. The programme includes nutrition education, physical activity and behaviour change components with an emphasis on family involvement and learning through art and play.

For the first 12 weeks of the 24-week programme, parents/carers and their children attend a 2-hour weekly session. The sessions include workshops that teach the principles of a healthy lifestyle through art, music and play based activities. Nutrition workshops encourage adults to develop an understanding of how to make the best food choices, to plan menus, shop for the family, and prepare healthy meals. This is followed by snack time where families can enjoy a variety of healthy snacks from the 'Trim Tots' recipe book and learn how to produce simple healthy homemade snacks and meals suitable for all the family.

Exercise sessions for adults teach simple aerobic and body conditioning moves that can easily be fitted into a busy lifestyle. While adults exercise, children take part in play based activities designed specifically for the programme. Each week participants will receive a piece of exercise equipment (e.g. a ball or spacehopper) building into a family activity pack.

Topic

Consuming

Characteristics (type, level)

Neighbourhood

Country/Countries of implementation

UK

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this programme is to promote a healthy lifestyle both in pre-school children, aged between one and five, and their carers.

Target Group

Pre-school children and their parents/carers

Status

ongoing

Start and Completion dates

2012 -today

Lifestyle and Behavior Change

The programme includes nutrition education, physical activity and behaviour change components with an emphasis on family involvement and learning through art and play.

Effects on:

Health and Wellbeing	The practice aims to reduce overweight in pre-school children. Evidence shows that overweight children are more likely than children who are not overweight to be obese in adulthood, and have poorer health outcomes.
Vulnerable populations	Evidence in England shows that nearly 25% of children aged 6 in the most deprived areas are obese compared to around 12% in the least deprived areas. There is social gradient in childhood obesity by area deprivation in England. This programme could potentially impact on inequalities in childhood obesity. The effect on inequalities has not been evaluated.
Environment	Not known, but could potentially encourage active transport, as a result of encouraging family physical activity. It may also potentially influence food consumption behaviours in favour of environmentally sustainable foods.

Initiated and/or implemented by

Trim Tots healthy lifestyle programme was developed by a team of child health professionals from the Institute of Child Health together with a team of community artists, experienced in delivering educational art workshops to young children. It was initiated because few evidenced based interventions exist for the prevention of obesity in pre-school children that are community based and target the whole family to improve lifestyles and health.

Stakeholders and sectors involved

Trim Tots was developed by a multidisciplinary team including healthcare professionals from a range of disciplines: medicine, dietetics, psychology; exercise physiologists and practitioners, artists and early years professionals. Other stakeholders included: children's centre staff, community workers, parents and families and industry partners.

Financial support

Funding was provided through a research grant awarded to Professor Atul Singhal at UCL GOS Institute of Child Health, London. Contributions were also made by Nutricia PLC, a manufacturer of infant foods, local authorities and children's centres.

Evidence-base

The practice is based on knowledge about child health and nutrition. A large evidence base shows that a healthy balanced diet and the right levels of physical activity can prevent overweight.

Main activities

For the first 12 weeks of the 24-week programme, parents/carers and their children attend a 2-hour weekly session. The sessions include workshops that teach the principles of a healthy lifestyle through art, music and play based activities. Nutrition workshops encourage adults to develop an understanding of how to make the best food choices, to plan menus, shop for the family, and prepare healthy meals. This is followed by snack time where families can enjoy a variety of healthy snacks from the 'Trim Tots' recipe book and learn how to produce simple healthy homemade snacks and meals suitable for all the family.

Exercise sessions for adults teach simple aerobic and body conditioning moves that can easily be fitted into a busy lifestyle. While adults exercise, children take part in play based activities designed specifically for the programme. Each week participants will receive a piece of exercise equipment (e.g. a ball or spacehopper) building into a family activity pack. A supplementary session will be available during the first 12 weeks to give the families an extra opportunity for active play and learning. During the second 12 weeks a single weekly session consolidates learning using practical examples.

Evaluation

Two randomised controlled trials have been carried out.

Main results

The programme was evaluated in two RCT's and found to be effective in reducing obesity risk (demonstrated by a reduction in BMI up to 2 years after completing the programme). Health benefits were also suggested by: a reductions in blood pressure and body fatness and improvements in dietary habits.

The programme was well accepted and liked by participating families and children's centre staff.

Key success factors and barriers

Key barriers were mainly financial. Funding for projects of this nature is difficult to secure in the UK mainly due to restrictions imposed by Research Bodies for example the National Institutes of Health Research. As it targets healthy children and is aimed at prevention, Trim Tots fits into the Public Health arm of this funding body. Under this stream, applications for funding can only be submitted with respect to research costs and do not cover the cost of interventions. Therefore, funding must be obtained for the intervention and research separately. Investment has enabled the programme to move forward this year and to be delivered in London. However, costs of further programmes would require funding.

INHERIT Perspective

TrimTots is included because it has been shown to be effective in improving dietary habits and reducing overweight among children up to 2 years after completing the programme. It has potential to influence family food choices and activity levels in the longer term in favour of healthier and more sustainable lifestyles. The intervention is available to all families with children attending the children centre where the intervention is taking place. Since children in more deprived areas are more likely to be overweight than those in less deprived areas, the intervention has potential to reduce inequalities in overweight and obesity through behaviour change.

More information

<http://www.trimtots.com/>

Lanigan J, Collins S, Lanigan-Coyte K, Tang H, Birbara T, Kokoreli M et al. Prevention of Obesity in Preschool Children. Obesity 18[Abstract Supplement 2], S104. 2010.

Lanigan J, Singhal A. Trim Tots Project Summary. 2011. London, Institute of Child Health.

Lanigan J, Singhal A. Early nutrition and long-term health: a practical approach. Proc Nutr Soc 2009; 68(4):422-429.

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