



A NEW ONLINE PARENTAL SELF-GUIDED PROGRAM TO PROMOTE CHILDREN'S HEALTHY EATING HABITS AND POSITIVE FEEDING PRACTICES: DEVELOPMENT AND INITIAL FINDINGS OF THE PILOT STUDY

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Research project *Food Parenting: study of a new web-based parent intervention*, FCT (PTDC/PSI-GER/30432/2017)

01. BACKGROUND

The current young children's dietary patterns are concerning. Although programs that actively involve parents in modifying feeding practices are promising (1), the processes of change and the effectiveness of the methodologies used to impact those practices have been poorly studied (2,3).

We aim to describe the development of *SmartFeeding4Kids* (SF4K), an online self-guided program to help parents of young children modify their child's eating patterns, reinforce practices that encourage children's autonomy and self-regulation intake, and overcome challenges related to the child's feeding. We also present initial findings from the ongoing pilot study of the SF4K, regarding parents' experience with the app.

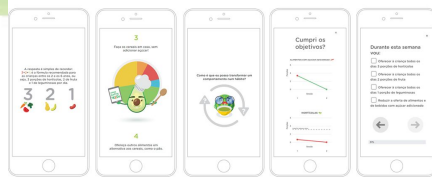
02. METHODS

The SF4K is based on theoretical models of self-regulation (4,5) and habit formation (6), using behavioral change techniques as self-monitoring, goal setting, and feedback.

The program includes 7 sessions:

- information about nutritional guidelines for young children (S1);
- effective and ineffective practices to overcome specific barriers regarding feeding (S2,3,4);
- how to form a new feeding habit (S5);
- 2 booster sessions (S6,7).

In each session, parents receive feedback about the behaviors discussed and are invited to choose two specific goals from a



list of objectives tailored according to their initial assessment data. Between sessions, parents keep monitoring their feeding practices and the child's food intake. From session 2 onwards, parents start to see their evolution regarding those outcomes and are informed whether they achieved their goals on specific behaviors.

The SF4K effectiveness will be tested with a two-arm (SF4K vs. psychoeducational intervention) and four-time (baseline, post-intervention, 3 and 6 months follow-up) repeated measures RCT design. Parental feeding practices and children's intake of vegetables, fruits, and sugar-sweetened foods will be primary outcomes. We also will assess adherence and involvement throughout the program.

The SF4K pilot study is ongoing, involving 38 Portuguese parents of 2-6y old children. Most participants are mothers (92.1%), with post-secondary education (86.8%), and a mean age of 37.8 years (SD=4.03). 52.6% of the children are male, and their mean age is 4.5 years (SD=1.40).

03. RESULTS

The 7 semi-structured interviews carried out so far indicate that parents considered the platform appealing and intuitive. The main messages of the sessions were conveyed clearly and concretely and were easily remembered. Some parents felt the program structure was demanding and that they needed to discipline themselves to accomplish some tasks (e.g., self-monitoring, goal setting) adequately and in the defined timings.

04. CONCLUSIONS

The parents' contributions made it possible to identify the intervention strengths and perform the necessary adjustments to reduce the parent's burden for the SF4K RCT, considering the difficulties encountered.

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