Guided goal setting is a new approach to goal setting where adolescents are presented with a set of preformatted goals that can help facilitate behavior change. The process allows adolescents to choose those goals that are most important to them. Through guided goal setting, an adolescent can define success in self-fulfilling ways, come up with strategies for success, and divide behavior change into attainable steps. Surprisingly, despite frequent use, goal setting with nutrition and/or physical education programs has not been significantly studied in middle school students. EatFit, an initiative of the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) administered by the University of California, Davis, is based upon this new approach to goal setting in a comprehensive program for young teens.

**EatFit INTERVENTION PROGRAM**

EatFit is a goal-oriented intervention designed to challenge middle school students to improve their eating and fitness choices. This program uses computer technology to assist adolescents with diet assessment and “guided” goal setting for making healthy lifestyle choices. The program provides skill building experiences and social support to promote dietary self-efficacy and goal attainment.

**INNOVATION/CREATIVITY**

EatFit’s audience was middle school students in various settings: low-income classrooms, after-school programs, 4-H Youth Development Programs, EFNEP, Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program (FSNEP), and other youth programs. EatFit staff conducted focus groups with middle schoolers and identified three factors that were motivators for behavior change: increased energy, improved appearance, and greater independence. The nine-lesson curriculum addressed these three factors rather than focusing on disease prevention, a difficult concept for middle school students.

Student feedback influenced development of the program. Students were included in focus groups, individual interviews, pilot testing, and field testing. They recommended the workbook’s magazine format as a tool that would be attention-getting.

The EFNEP Evaluation & Reporting System was adapted for the EatFit personalized assessment. Culturally diverse foods likely to be eaten by adolescents were added. The development of portion size photographs allowed a more accurate depiction of serving size. The assessment database was expanded to include “added sugar” to help students evaluate their sugar consumption.

Students were aided in setting their dietary goals. Areas for which students could set guided goals included increased calcium intake, increase iron intake, reduce fat intake, reduce added sugar intake, increase fruits and vegetables, and improve general eating habits. Using the computerized assessment package, they assessed their daily eating habits and were guided to set goals based on the assessment.

EatFit encouraged community and family participation. Its web site, www.eatfit.net, offers resources to staff for expanding the EatFit program into the community. Bilingual brochures encourage parent participation in the program.

**REPLICABILITY**

EatFit is a Cooperative Extension program. Cooperative Extension offices throughout the U.S., its territories, military bases, and several countries outside the U.S. can use the program with their English speaking populations. Resources needed to replicate the program include print materials, Internet access, and supplies for food demonstrations. On-line training is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

**THEORY BASE/RATIONALE**

Three major constructs of the Social Cognitive Theory: self-
Community Nutritionary®

**CASE STUDIES**

Efficacy, outcome expectancies, and self-regulation, were applied to the development, implementation, and evaluation of EatFit. Lessons support self-efficacy by allowing students to practice skills, receive encouragement, and establish social support. Practicing cooking and physical activity skills in the classroom increases self-efficacy such that students are more likely to repeat these activities on their own. Students are provided with clear and meaningful results that will occur if they improve their dietary and physical activity choices: increased energy, independence, and improved appearance. The curriculum promotes self-regulation through the guided goal setting process. Students have the opportunity to assess their dietary and physical activity behaviors. Then they set goals and monitor their progress in achieving those goals with prizes awarded for goal attainment.

**OUTCOMES/EVALUATION DATA**

In 1999-2000, pilot testing was conducted on 155 middle school students. Field testing was conducted with approximately 10,000 students throughout California by Cooperative Extension staff in 2001-2002. In a crossover controlled field trial, EatFit was evaluated for effectiveness in 46 students. 44 to 73 percent of participants improved in dietary and/or physical activity for self-efficacy and behavior. Significant improvement was observed in dietary behaviors and in physical activity self-efficacy. When students set a dietary goal, they significantly increased positive dietary behaviors specific to that goal. Close to 75 percent of students rated themselves as having made at least one lasting improvement in dietary choices; 69 percent reported making at least one lasting improvement in physical activity choices.

A randomized controlled field trial of 94 students was conducted to investigate the effect of the program’s guided goal setting. Participants in the “treatment” group (intervention with goal setting) made significant improvements in dietary practices (73 percent), compared to the control group receiving intervention without guided goal setting (54 percent). The treatment group also improved significantly compared to controls on the physical activity self-efficacy variable (44 percent; 29 percent).

**QUESTIONS**

1. **What is guided goal setting?**
   a. One on one discussion of goals
   b. Self-examination using a standardized test of values and goals
   c. Step-by-step instruction on setting personal goals
   d. Offering a set of preselected goals from which to choose

2. **Which were motivators for behavior change among teens participating in EatFit?**
   a. Financial reward, prizes, “no homework” nights
   b. Increased energy, improved appearance, greater independence
   c. Increased leisure time, an end-of-year party, a free period at school
   d. A field trip, more music in class, an expanded cafeteria menu

3. **In which area did EatFit students significantly improve their scores?**
   a. Nutrition self-efficacy
   b. Food and nutrition knowledge
   c. Budgeting
   d. Classification of foods into food groups

4. **What percentage of students rated themselves as having made at least one lasting improvement in dietary choices?**
   a. Close to 39 percent
   b. Close to 50 percent
   c. Close to 69 percent
   d. Close to 75 percent

**LESSONS LEARNED**

“The success of this program reflects the inclusion of motivators and goals that are relevant to middle school students. The entire program reinforces the synergistic relationship among nutrition, physical activity, and overall physical fitness as a way to increase energy, improve appearance, and attain greater independence.”

— Marilyn Townsend, Ph.D.
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**ANSWERS**

1. **d**
2. **b**
3. **a**
4. **d**