

MORECAMBE BAY AND "5 A DAY"

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BACKGROUND

The NHS Plan⁽¹⁾, published in July 2000, contained a commitment to introduce a national 5 A DAY programme for England by 2004.

Increasing evidence has shown that eating at least five portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables reduces the risk of chronic diseases such as cancer⁽²⁾, stroke⁽³⁾ and CHD by up to 20%. Other health benefits have been suggested, including the management of diabetes, the reduction of symptoms in asthma^(4,5) and prevention of the escalating problem of obesity. The incidence of obesity has risen dramatically – trebling since the 1980's. In children, almost 17% of 2-15 year-olds are obese⁽⁶⁾.

Expert bodies including WHO⁽⁷⁾, and the UK's Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy and Nutrition have recommended eating at least five portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables each day – the message that is at the heart of the Department of Health 5 A DAY programme.

To reach this goal many people would have to more than double the amount of fruit and vegetables they currently eat. The situation is even worse for children, with the average 4-6 year-old eating only two portions of fruit and vegetables a day and one in five eating no fruit at all⁽⁸⁾.

There are also inequalities in consumption, with those in the lowest income groups eating the least fruit and vegetables⁽⁹⁾.

The aim of the 5 A DAY programme is to increase awareness of, improve access to and availability of, and increase consumption of fruit and vegetables, ensuring they are easily available to everyone, wherever they live.

The programme includes local initiatives, and at a national level involves work with retailers, producers, distributors and caterers. It also includes the National School Fruit Scheme.

THE NATIONAL SCHOOL FRUIT SCHEME

The North West became part of the National School Fruit Scheme in May 2003. It was introduced after the NHS Plan 2000 included a commitment to implement a national school fruit scheme by 2004. This involves providing a free portion of fruit to infant school children to improve their nutrition, help to develop the habit of eating fruit and to give them a healthier start in life. The scheme is now funded by the Department of Health.

In Morecambe Bay the uptake of the scheme by schools

has been encouraging, with 98% of schools offering this to their pupils.

Some schools have extended the scheme by self-financing fruit for the rest of the school or opening fruit tuck shops where the older children can buy a piece of fruit at minimal cost.

LOCAL INITIATIVES

The 5 A DAY programme is funded through lottery funds. Sixty-six PCT's with poor health status and social deprivation were invited to bid for a 5 A DAY grant to develop local 5 A DAY initiatives.

Morecambe Bay PCT was successful in their bid and gained funding for two project workers to work over a two-year period with the most disadvantaged communities of Morecambe Bay. The focus is in distinct wards of Barrow, Lancaster and Morecambe.

The programme works within the existing framework established to implement the Morecambe Bay Food and Health Strategy. This aims to address food and health inequalities through building partnerships and developing and implementing action in early years, schools and community settings.

The programme has various strands including development of local food action plans, school/nursery food policies, growing schemes, cooking schemes and tasting opportunities.

SCHOOLS

Many of these initiatives are taking place within local schools and communities and many children have already been involved.

The programme completed its first year in June and within each locality work is underway in at least five primary and secondary schools. The aim is to support schools towards developing policies that encourage and enable pupils to choose three portions of fruit and vegetables a day within school – at snack time, in packed lunches and school meals.

Cumbria Healthy Schools have produced a 'Food in Schools' resource pack and Lancashire Healthy Schools have coordinated a packed lunch resource box.

Recently a networking event for schools and organisations that are able to support work on food issues within school

was organised in Lancaster through *5 A DAY*. Agencies involved included Lancashire County Council School Grounds Development, Environmental Health, Lancaster District Wildlife Forum and Organic Growers. All these initiatives support a whole school approach through curriculum activity and policy development.

GROWING SCHEMES

Schools and nurseries in Lancaster and Barrow have also received funds from *5 A DAY* to develop their own growing schemes.

This helps to increase awareness of where fruit and vegetables come from, encourages practical skills and gives children an opportunity to grow and taste their own home produce. This can extend into curriculum-based work and provides various opportunities in subjects such as science and maths.

COOKING SCHEMES

In Morecambe a school has recently started an after-school course for parents and children. This is being run in conjunction with the Adult College who are supporting family learning initiatives. This helps development of cooking skills, social and family interaction.

Some after-school Kids Clubs offer 'cook and eat' as an activity and report that the children really enjoy it.

TASTING SESSIONS

Over the last year there have been at least 15 tasting sessions mainly with children in nurseries, schools, playschools and playschemes. Good practice has been collated into a 'Funky Food activities – tasting session guide' aimed at schools and children's clubs to enable them to develop their own activities.

PROGRESS

Over the last year over 20,000 people within Morecambe Bay PCT have been involved in different aspects of the programme. Within the coming year plans will be developed to sustain current activities and develop additional projects.

There will be a continued focus on *5 A DAY* in schools through promotion of fruit for Key Stage 2 pupils, packed lunch policies and quality school meals.

EVALUATION

Evaluation of the pilot stage of the National School Fruit Scheme included the following:-

- School staff regarded the scheme as a way of improving children's health and a supplement to children's diets
- 97% of schools regarded the scheme as a support to teaching and learning about healthy eating

- Giving fruit out in individual class groups has the advantage of providing social time and time for learning
- More than half the schools surveyed had noticed an improvement in the ethos and atmosphere in classes involved in the scheme

An NOP qualitative survey showed that parents reported that more than a quarter of children and their families eat more fruit at home after their school joined the National School Fruit Scheme and that nearly half of all parents questioned think that it has made them more aware of the importance of fruit for a healthy diet. Ninety-five percent of parents say that their child always, often or sometimes ate the fruit provided at school.

The 66 PCT's chosen to participate in the *5 A DAY* initiatives are being evaluated using the FACET questionnaire. This is a tool used for assessing fruit and vegetable consumption within a population. The baseline data has been collected and will be repeated at the end of the initiatives, with results available in 2006.

To date, results from five pilot sites show that community-wide initiatives can produce important changes in people's knowledge, access and intake of fruit and vegetables.

For more information, see www.5ADAY.nhs.uk

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