Fit4YAMs-2: health-related text messages preferences of overweight rural young adult males

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To maximise the effects of text messaging interventions messages need to be engaging and motivational. Striking the right balance with message content, text talk, text acronyms and emoticons, delivery frequency/time, and personalisation of messages is crucial. This is particularly important when trying to appeal to traditionally hard to engage groups such as rural young adult males (YAMs).

Fit4YAMs-1 reported the detailed method used to develop a text messaging intervention specifically designed for overweight or obese (OWOB) rural/regional YAMs. Fit4YAMs-2 reports on the preferences of OWOB rural/regional YAMs for health-related text messages.

Contrary to our hypothesis that YAMs would prefer health messages that used text talk, acronyms and emoticons, the participating Group 1 YAMs indicated a preference for correct spelling and grammar particularly for health-related text messages. Similarly, emoticons were not a preferred option as these were considered "teenage girl talk".

However, the YAMs were unanimous in their preference for short, concise messages of 1-2 sentences. Longer messages were not engaging. Personalisation of messages was deemed important. Not "fake" personalised with just their name at the start of the message, but really targeted towards their individual goals and interests. A frequency of 3-4 messages/week delivered on weekday afternoons or weekend mornings were considered the best approach to motivate them.

The refined "yammised" messages were sent to a different group of OWOB YAMs (Group 2) for rating on a scale of 1 very poor through 5 very good. On average, 51 out of the 74 yammised messages were well received, getting above average ratings (mean 4.3 out of 5). Within the 23 messages that did not rate well, we deliberately included several messages that used emoticons and acronyms, to confirm the findings from the Group 1 participants. These types of messages were also not well received by Group 2, but were not the most disliked messages within the collection. Interestingly, the most disliked messages were regarding diet. A message relating to the consumption of frozen meals in place of takeaway food was the most disliked followed closely by another message which addressed reducing alcohol consumption to cut kilojoule intake.

The above average messages will be used in the intervention phase of the Fit4YAMs project when we perform a pilot study to ascertain the effectiveness of using specifically designed health-related text messages plus incentives to promote and maintain weight loss in 17-25 year old OWOB YAMs in rural/regional Australia.