

## Essential Evidence on a page: No. 33 Assessment of the *Active for Life* campaign

Adrian Davis 08/09/2009

Top line: Increasing physical activity levels is a long-term task. Short-term promotional programmes encouraging behaviour change may be insufficient. Broader policy and environmental changes to support physical activity are likely to be required.

In 1996 the Health Education Authority (superceded by NICE) ran a three year health promotion campaign to encourage uptake of moderate intensity physical activity participation as recommendations in new guidance from the Department of Health. The recommendations were for a minimum of 30 minutes of moderate physical activity for adults and an hour for children on most days of the week. The campaign was based on the concept of social marketing, defined as “the design, implementation and control of programmes aimed at increasing the acceptability of a social idea or practice in one or more groups of target adopters”.

Campaign resources (including posters, leaflets, two web sites and other promotional items) were developed to promote the main campaign message to specific priority groups. The initial campaign used a 40 second TV advertisement “The thirty minute games”. The advertisement emphasised the importance of activities such as walking, cycling and gardening for health and emphasised the 30 minute element of the recommendation. The advertisement was aired over a six week period in the spring of 1996 across a number of commercial channels, with a total expenditure in the region of £2 million. The initial TV campaign was targeted as broadly as possible across all adults aged 16–74 years.

A second phase began in 1997, aimed at men and women aged 50+. TV advertisements was repeated in July 1997 as evaluation from the previous year had shown that the advertisement was received more favourably by older people. Other advertising included campaigns in tabloid newspapers aimed at middle aged men. A third phase (1998) was aimed at young women aged 16–24 and used advertisements placed in women’s magazines instead of TV advertising. In each phase, the advertising was reinforced with an extensive programme of public relations and promotions including media advocacy, national press launches, national roadshows, competitions, workplace promotions and co-promotions with major retailers and manufacturers. In addition to the main campaign, two sub-campaigns communicated messages to groups that were defined as having particular access or communication needs: people from black and minority ethnic communities and people with disabilities. These were highly targeted eg through specialist media.

Researchers concluded that there was a small but significant increase in the proportion of people knowledgeable about the new moderate physical activity recommendations following the main television advertisement.<sup>1</sup> However, there was no significant difference between those recalling the campaign and those who did not, suggesting that the change in knowledge may not have been attributable to the television advertising, which was only one component of the integrated campaign. Overall, there was no evidence that *ACTIVE for LIFE* increased physical activity, either in general or in any subgroup.

---

<sup>1</sup> Hillson, M., Cavill, N., Nachahal, K., Diamond, A., White, I. 2001 National level promotion of physical activity: results from England’s *Active for Life* campaign, *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 55: 755-761.