

ABSTRACT

Abstract title: Nutrition4Youngsters: exploring the impact of equipping future generations with essential nutritional knowledge to improve health and wellbeing

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Background: The importance of nutrition education in schools is paramount in empowering young people to live healthier lives across their lifespan, through education around health promoting behaviours to optimise cognitive performance, health and wellbeing. Research indicates supporting young people to make positive food choices requires a synergistic relationship between guardians, teaching staff and pupils. However, workshops on nutrition education are lacking within the Key Stage 2 (KS2) curriculum.

Objectives: To evaluate the effectiveness of the Nutritank Nutrition4Youngsters (N4Y) teaching sessions for children aged 8-11; To equip primary school students with knowledge of nutrition, food labelling and the gut microbiome.

Methods: An in-person two-hour teaching session was delivered by Imperial medical students as trained N4Y volunteers. Quantitative data was collected to assess the nutritional knowledge of students from Sir John Lillie Primary School via a quiz before and after the teaching session. Results were obtained from 76 students and paired to compare for differences before and after the session using Wilcoxon signed rank test ($p \leq 0.05$).

Results: There were significant ($p < 0.001$) differences between students' total quiz scores before and after the session, with a median increase of 25%, 95% CI [20%, 25%]. Additionally, when looking at individual questions, there was a mean increase of 18.55% (SD = 0.08) in correct scores after the session, with highest increases seen in questions focusing on the Eatwell Guide, food building blocks and gut microbiome.

Conclusions: The study demonstrates the significant positive impact of N4Y teaching sessions on the nutritional knowledge of primary school children but also highlighted the gaps and shortcomings of the current KS2 curriculum. Expanding N4Y teaching sessions on a national level, and including additional sessions aimed towards parents, would improve the social norm around nutritional education, fostering a culture of prioritising nutrition and lifestyle medicine for future generations.

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