

Stoplight Healthy Living: Translating Research into Practice



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Introduction

People with disabilities have higher rates of obesity and poor nutrition, and lower rates of physical activity than their peers without disabilities (Havercamp & Scott, 2015). For those with ID, these disparities result in higher rates of diabetes and other diseases, more days of illness, and poorer quality of life (Krahn, Walker, & Correa-De-Araujo, 2015). Yet, people with ID CAN be healthy! The Kansas Disability & Health Program, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, has developed a research-based intervention titled Stoplight Healthy Living to assist people with ID in making healthy choices.

Development

The program is based on the Stoplight Diet for Children (Epstein & Squires, 1988). It is a simple, visual method of teaching adolescents to choose healthier foods, which are classified into three groups based on their caloric content, nutritional value, and volume. These groups are color-coded to correspond with the color scheme of a stoplight:

	RED	Whoa, eat rarely or never e.g., cookies and French fries.
	YELLOW	Slow, use caution e.g., low fat yogurt and sweet potatoes
	GREEN	Go, eat all you want e.g., apples and broccoli

Development parameters included:

- Promote choice and self-determination for participants
- Focus on behavior change by reinforcing the importance of good nutrition *and* increased physical activity
- Involve disability service providers, including direct support professionals (DSPs), who can provide ongoing support for healthy lifestyle choices after the formal program ends
- Disseminate the program through disability service providers across the state via a train-the-trainer model.



Description

Stoplight Healthy Living is delivered in 1 to 1.5-hour sessions over six consecutive weeks. Five overall goals are presented to participants at the start of each session:

- be healthy
- have fun
- value self-determination in making healthy choices
- support each other
- make small changes every day



Stoplight engages small groups of community-living adults with ID in information-sharing and hands-on activities to learn about healthy foods, physical activity and social support. Activities include:

- putting **GREEN**, **YELLOW**, and **RED** stickers on foods to learn the Stoplight system
- exercising with videos and games
- using My Plate placemats and laminated food cards to assemble a healthy meal
- judging healthy portion sizes using one's hand
- tracking movement with a pedometer
- guessing the amount of sugar in typical beverages
- role-playing how to order a healthier meal in a restaurant
- preparing and eating healthy snacks
- using a color-coded grocery shopping list to encourage purchase of **GREEN** foods
- self-monitoring to track changes in diet, movement, and seeking social support

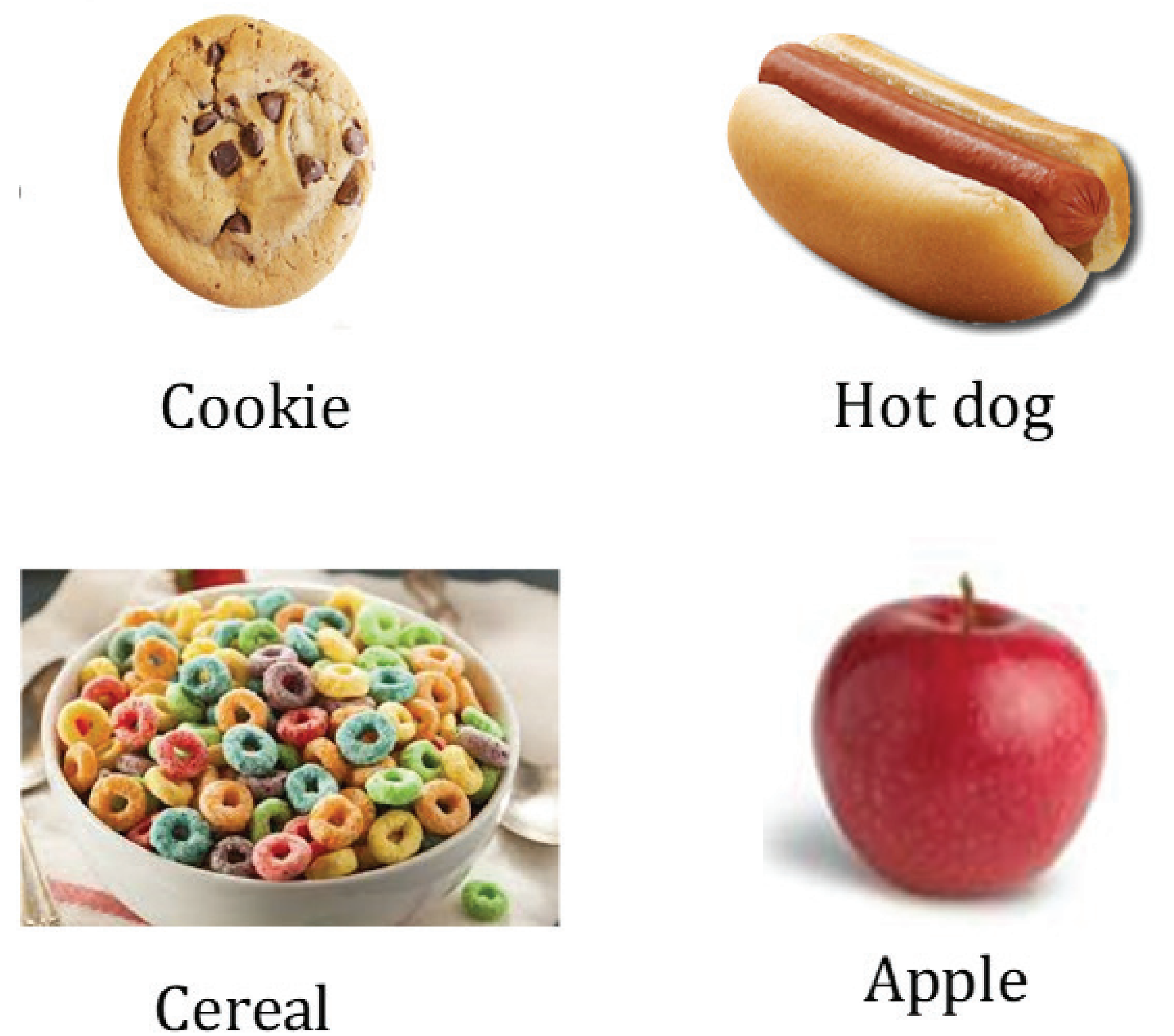
Evaluation

Two trials have been conducted in supported living settings. The first trial tested program materials and activities. The second evaluated program results, using pre-, mid-point-, and post-tests administered on paper with responses featuring pictures to evaluate change in knowledge and behavior. Across the two trials, attendance was high and consistent with 85 and 90% of participants in groups one and two, respectively, attending all six sessions.

Evaluation of the second trial showed some positive results as well as some that were equivocal, as noted in the adjoining table. Of the 17 participants, 14 completed the survey of health knowledge and behaviors before, during, and after the program.

Example of an evaluation item

4. Circle the one food below that is the most healthy and good for you.



Trial 2 Evaluation Results (n=14)

Behaviors	Percent of respondents answering yes or correctly		
	Pre	Mid	Post
Ate fruit and/or vegetables in last day	42.9%	64.3%	64.3%
Did physical activity in the last week	100%	100%	100%
Did physical activity in addition to walking in last week	35.7%	28.6%	28.6%
Drank soda in the last day	57.1%	35.7%	28.6%
Identified 2 healthy food purchases from last grocery store visit	50.0%	71.4%	100%
Knowledge			
Correctly identified foods high in fat/sugar	42.9%	71.4%	35.7%
Correctly identified a healthy, balanced meal plate	70.9%	80.0%	78.6%
Correctly identified the most healthy, fast food meal choice	57.1%	64.3%	78.6%
Correctly identified the most healthy, "green" food	100%	100%	92.9%

Anecdotal results included reports of participants drinking water instead of soda with meals, ordering water when eating out, and buying wheat bread instead of white bread.

Next Steps

For continued development of *Stoplight Healthy Living*, plans are underway to:

- enhance the self-monitoring component
- revise evaluations for increased sensitivity
- test administration of evaluations on tablets
- train facilitators across the state by webinar

The success of the program in creating long-term change relies on the support of program administrators, direct support professionals, and family members to reinforce the healthy habits that participants learn in the sessions. Thus, supporters are encouraged to join in the sessions. *Stoplight Healthy Living* has implications for promoting health and research, practice, and policy on health supports.

References

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