Approaches to the Prevention and Management of Childhood Obesity: The Role of Social Networks and the Use of Social Media and Related Electronic Technologies

1. Over the past five years, the number of Facebook users has grown from roughly 50 million to roughly 900 million people worldwide.

2. In this statement, social networks and their relationship to health and obesity in children are reviewed and interventions using social networks and social media are described.

3. Effective weight management programs for children are limited and the ones available are expensive; an engaging and accessible strategy for promoting healthy habits and preventing and treating obesity in children is critical.

4. Although environmental solutions to obesity such as making changes to the environment and limiting unhealthy foods and beverages marketed to children has potential for success, these transformations are difficult to implement and can take a long time to make an impact on obesity.

5. Overweight youth are more likely to be socially isolated and marginalized and social networks can affect their body image; adolescents are more likely to underestimate their own weight status when surrounded by obese peers.

6. Obesity-related health behaviors are associated with adolescent social networks, including participation in organized sports, fast food consumption, and computer/video game screen time.

7. Because social networks may be critical in shaping young people's eating habits and health behaviors including bodyweight and vice versa, the potential of social-network-based health promotion interventions is very important.

8. E-games such as Geocaching, a treasure-hunt type of activity, encourages both social networking and outdoor activity as individuals or groups search for items described on websites using navigational tools and leverages social to increase physical activity.

9. Studies have demonstrated the benefit of email and texting interventions on weight loss in adolescents -- one school-based intervention incorporating physical activity monitoring using pedometers and e-mail support was successful in promoting physical activity and selected healthy eating behaviors in adolescent boys and girls.

10. Although the authors make recommendations for further research, they also provide clinicians steps to using social networks in the prevention or management of childhood obesity.
   a. Define the goal of the intervention
   b. Identify the social network
   c. Develop and pilot test the intervention
   d. Implement the intervention
   e. Spread the intervention

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