

Epidoros maps the junk food web



Photo: Dr Ori Gudes

For parents trying to help their children stay healthy or battle obesity the journey to and from school can become a gauntlet of junk food outlets which their largely unsupervised children must run, often unsuccessfully.

In a bid to help councils, schools, parents and public health advocates Griffith Health Institute (GHI) research fellow and, spatial scientist Dr Ori Gudes developed Epidoros, a mapping tool which allows planners to input relationship information to tell a

more vivid story about the health of their neighbourhoods.

This could include the location of elderly people in relation to public transport, after hours GPs in relation to population in high risk or the proximity of junk food outlets to schools.

GHI, working in collaboration with the Logan Beaudesert Health Coalition (LBHC), researched over 31 statistical local areas within the boundaries of the

LBHC. Dr Gudes compiled, geo-coded and spatially analysed data on a vast array of health-related topics.

"I aimed for real evidence, data that could genuinely inform the actions of health decision-makers," Dr Gudes said.

The project was led by Professor Elizabeth Kendall and aimed to get people working together to solve long term problems by providing relevant and compelling information.

"The data available up to now has been largely based on disease rates and hospital beds," Professor Kendall said.

"Planners had little access to data that addressed the broad determinants of health, such as the environment, financial resources, socio-economic measurements or community assets. We needed a way of building knowledge to underpin this different approach to health planning."

Epidoros is currently being used by decision makers in Queensland Health, Greater Metro South Brisbane Medicare Local and Logan City Council. The group plans to expand its dataset and functionality (especially developing new analytical tools) and improving its usability and interface.

Parents have to get creative to be active



Photo: Exercise needs to become a family activity.

Young children can be hard work. As well as literally draining a parent's energy, they make a good night's sleep impossible and require constant attention.

Griffith Health Institute researcher Dr Kyra Hamilton has found this to be potentially crucial to parents avoiding obesity and developing an active in family culture.

Dr Hamilton's research has earned her the prestigious Herman Schaalma Award from the European Health Psychology Society (EHPS).

"Mothers especially take on an overwhelming ethic of care in which the kids come first, this is natural. What our research found was that mothers often also develop a perception of self-care which is associated with guilt," said Dr Hamilton.

"At these times mothers need more guilt-free' social support.

"What we've found is that parents have to create an active family culture so you don't have one parent feeling responsible and frustrated. In the early days parents need to be creative about how they use their time and structure exercise."

Linking with community activities can help parents understand what is possible, as well as broadening a social circle which can shrink very quickly once the congratulations die down. Dr Hamilton's top tips were:

- Make a plan, but be flexible
- Aim for a few short bursts of exercise every day
- Combine normal activities with exercise, an extra vigorous sweep or dance with the kids
- Make sure it's enjoyable
- Involve the whole family

"The health decisions parents make for themselves can affect their child's attitudes to physical activity. The child-bearing years are a time when people tend to put on weight and can develop unhealthy habits, which could reinforce the weight gain, leading to potentially unhealthy habits in children."