



Main Objective

Make healthy meal and snack choices and be physically active each day.

Background

Making healthy choices determines how healthy you and your students will be. We know that an apple is a healthier snack than a bar of chocolate, that having baked chicken for dinner is better than pizza, and that playing outside with friends is better than sitting on the couch in front of the TV. But sometimes making those decisions is not so easy.

Younger students can spend this month identifying healthy foods and activities and should be encouraged to choose the healthier options whenever possible. As students get a little older, they can start to focus their attention on portion sizes (see KP KIDS handout, “What is a Serving Size?”). While it is OK to eat a half of a cup of ice cream, eating three cups is not very good for the body.

Ultimately, elementary school students can slowly begin to learn about the nutritional information provided on Nutrition Facts food labels. Starting in 1994, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) required almost all food products to have an identical Nutrition Facts food label. This label allows consumers to know the ingredient and nutrient content of the foods they are choosing thereby helping them to make healthier choices. The list of ingredients is very important for people who have allergies to certain foods, as it allows them to stay away from foods that may be harmful. The nutrient information allows consumers to know how much of each nutrient they will be consuming if they eat one serving of the product.

The most important item on the food label is the serving size. If more (or less) of the food is actually consumed, the nutrient amounts consumed should be adjusted accordingly. Just below the serving size is the number of calories per serving. The calories listed are a measure of energy consumed (from foods and beverages), but calories also measure energy expended (through physical activity and growth). If more calories are consumed than are expended, the body will begin to store those extra calories and body weight will increase. However, if fewer calories are consumed than are expended, the body weight will decrease.

The remainder of the information on the food label includes the amount of the other nutrients (fat, carbohydrates, protein, vitamins and minerals) per serving. Obviously, some of these nutrients you want to consume a lot and others you want to make sure you don't get too much. All of the labels are identical in format, so it is very easy to compare two or more labels side by side. (See handouts for more information including Kaiser Permanente's handout, “How to Read the Food Label” in English and Spanish.)

Students can use this knowledge to make healthier choices when eating at school, having snacks, consuming beverages or choosing fast-food menu options. A balanced diet is filled with more of the healthy foods and fewer of the not-so-healthy foods. Moderation and variety are key!

Take Home Activities

- 1) Look at and compare the food labels at home. If you have choices to make, compare the food labels and choose the food with the least amount of fat or sodium and the most fiber, protein or any vitamin or mineral.
- 2) Encourage everyone to make a health-based New Year's resolution (e.g. eat more fruits, vegetables and whole grains; drink less soda; be more physically active each day). See Kaiser Permanente's handouts, "Healthy Goal Setting for Kids and Parents."
- 3) As a family, make a list of all of the physically-active things you can do during the winter months.

School Activities

- 1) Ensure that healthy choices are available for students and staff in the cafeteria, the vending machines and at special events. USDA's Team Nutrition - Changing the Scene kit is a good resource to help promote this change. (See <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Resources/changing.html>)
- 2) Highlight healthy choices in the cafeteria by providing some nutritional information on the items served.
- 3) Set up a schoolwide event for students to walk around the yard during recess and get points for their classroom. The class with the most points wins! Students, teachers, principal and office staff should all participate as a way to increase their activity in the new year.

Classroom Reward Ideas

Give students healthy snacks (e.g. fruits, vegetables, graham crackers or dried fruit) instead of sweets.

Resources

American Heart Association

<http://www.americanheart.org>

There are several handouts that can be given to students to help them make healthy choices. Choose the section For Kids under Children's Health. All handouts can be downloaded free of charge.

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

<http://hp2010.nhlbihin.net/portion/keep.htm>

Here you will find some general information on portion sizes. There is a Portion Distortion Quiz, which would be useful for upper-elementary schoolchildren. There is also a Serving Size Card, which can be downloaded, copied and given to parents.

Kids Health

http://kidshealth.org/kid/stay_healthy/food/labels.html

This site provides user-friendly Nutrition Facts label information written for upper-elementary schoolchildren.

Food and Drug Administration

<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/foodlab.html>

This website walks through all of the details of the Nutrition Facts food label - definitely more information than most students need to know but helpful for those wanting to provide a more detailed lesson.



Activities Linked to 4th Grade Content Standards & Framework

**Writing 1.0 & 2.0,
Listening & Speaking
1.0 & 2.0**

**Written & Oral
English Language
Conventions 1.7**

**Statistics, Data
Analysis, & Probability
1.1 & 1.2**

Social Science 4.1.5

Physical Education 3.3

**Health Framework
Expectation 1**

**Health Framework
Expectation 1**

- Students can practice their writing, researching and penmanship skills by writing about their New Year's resolution. They can then share these stories out loud.
- As students start to learn more about the Nutrition Facts Food Label, you can start to put some of the words from the food label on their spelling list.
- Students can set up an interview for their families, friends or classmates to ask about their health-related goals for the new year. Once they have collected the data, they can use that information to identify the modes and medians and graph the data to explain to others.
- As a class, go to a farmers' market this month to see what is available. Encourage students to ask farmers from where in California the foods came.
- Help the students set and monitor a personal fitness goal to be active 3-4 times per week.
- Start to look more closely at food labels and make healthy choices based on the information provided.
- Discuss some of the barriers to eating healthy foods. As a class, can you come up with some ways to overcome these barriers?