

RD Tip Sheet

Nutrition Education Activities

As an RD, you can influence academic outcomes by providing nutrition education on the key behaviors. Consider using the suggested activities below as part of nutrition education initiatives in the classroom, after-school programs, community settings, or family counseling sessions.

Reducing Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Consumption

- **Encourage children** to bring in labels from their favorite beverages. Compare the amount of sugar in the different drinks and the amounts of other nutrients such as vitamins and minerals.
- **Ask children to measure** out the amount of sugar in commonly consumed beverages using a rough conversion of 4 g = 1 tsp. Note the amount in one serving vs. that in one bottle/container.
- **Ask children to calculate** the amount of money they spend on sugar-sweetened beverages each day, month, and year, then make connections about what that money could be spent on instead.
- **Create and taste test “faux soda”** by mixing plain seltzer water with the juice of a lemon, lime, or orange or a small amount of 100% fruit juice.
- **Put a thoroughly cleaned chicken bone** in a container of vinegar. After several days, it will become pliable, and once taken out and dried, it will become brittle. Explain to children that the acid in soda, similar to that in vinegar, can weaken the enamel on teeth, similar to the way it affected the bone, putting consumers at risk of cavities and other dental concerns.
- **Discuss advertising strategies** of popular beverage companies (consider sodas, sports drinks, and energy drinks). Have children use these strategies in a positive way by coming up with an advertisement or commercial for drinking water.

Promoting Fruit and Vegetable Intake

- As children learn the alphabet, they can draw fruits and vegetables that begin with the letters they learn. The drawings can be pasted in a large pot or bowl to make “vegetable soup” or “fruit salad.” Recipes for how to make a delicious vegetable soup or fruit salad can be shared with parents or the dishes can be made together in a group workshop.
- **Label bags** with the words “fruits” and “vegetables.” Give each child a photo of a fruit or vegetable and break them into two groups. The children will compete in a relay race. Each child will run to the bags and place the photo of the fruit or vegetable in the correct bag before running back to the line so the next child can go.
- **Organize a field trip** to a local farm where children and parents can pick fresh fruit or vegetables.

- **Play “20 Questions.”** Print visuals of different fruits or vegetables and ask for volunteers to play the game. Hold the visuals behind the participants’ heads so the rest of the group can see them, but they can’t. The participants must ask yes or no questions to try to guess which fruit or vegetable is in the visual.
- **Use storytelling** to communicate nutrition information about fruits and vegetables. Books such as *I Will Never Not Ever Eat a Tomato* by Lauren Child, *Eat Your Peas, Louise* by Pegeen Snow, *D.W. the Picky Eater* by Marc Brown, or *Stone Soup* (various authors) introduce fruit and vegetable concepts.
- **Taste tests** normally are well received among groups of children, parents, or both. Try different themes, for example, such as talking to families about the benefits of phytochemicals among different varieties of colored produce and then have a “colors of the rainbow” taste test. You also could work with a science class to identify parts of the plant and include a taste test with an item from each part (eg, celery for stems, spinach for leaves, carrots for roots).
- **Play fruit and vegetable “fear factor”** with older children or adults. Before class time, select a handful of fruits or vegetables that can be used in a taste test. For as many participants as you’ll have, jot down the name of one of those selected produce items on a piece of paper and place it in a bowl. Pass the bowl around and let each participant select a paper that will tell which item he or she will taste. Conduct the taste test and ask for opinions about the items they select. Could this be a new snack option? How could they see this being used in a meal at home?
- **Create a “farm store”** by cultivating a partnership between local farms and a school. Approach a farm about reasonable rates for produce delivery to the school and have parents sign up each week for a bag of produce. This can be like community-supported agriculture, in which a variety is given, or can focus on one produce item each week (a great strategy for farms with an abundance of a certain item). A recipe can be included with the bags each week to promote healthful eating.
- **Ask older children to create a restaurant menu** that incorporates fruits or vegetables into each dish.
- **During a parents’ workshop**, provide ideas for ways to include more fruits and vegetables in their children’s meals. Then encourage parents to brainstorm and share methods that they’ve either used or would want to try. Note all the ideas and then either copy the list or send out an e-mail to all participants containing the information.
- **Start a gardening program** to teach children or parents how to grow their own produce. This can be done at a school, community center, or apartment building, or you can show families how to make an herb garden on a windowsill.

Improving Diet Quality

- **Provide children with a copy** of the MyPlate coloring sheet (<http://www.choosemyplate.gov/food-groups/downloads/MyPlate/ColoringSheet.pdf>) and encourage them to create a healthful dinner that includes all five food groups.
- **Pass around nutrition labels** for various snack items, and talk about how to read the labels and ingredients. Based on the label information, determine which snacks are the best choices.
- **Ask participants to write down** what they ate yesterday. Identify how many servings from each food group they consumed and then use some type of visual to reflect those servings. For example, create a bar graph showing the number of servings using different color bars for the food groups or create paper chains using different color strips of paper to represent the food groups. Ask participants whether they see enough variety in their graphs or chains. If not, ask them how they could add more.
- **Green Eggs and Ham** by Dr Seuss, the classic story about trying new foods, can be a great introduction to taste testing for young children.
- **Bring in foods** that are eaten in other parts of the world for a taste test, as they may be unfamiliar to participants.
- **Discuss the difference** between “everyday foods” and “sometimes foods” or review the categorization of “go, slow, and whoa” foods. One corresponding activity can be to hold up photos of foods and ask students to run in place for a go food, march in place for a slow food, and freeze for a whoa food.
- **Watch the educational** version of *Super Size Me* with adolescents or parents. Talk about the diet quality and negative consequences.
- **Hold a meal-planning workshop** for parents and discuss ideas for family meals that are healthful, balanced, and easy to make. One example is a stir-fry made with frozen vegetables and reduced-sodium soy sauce, and another is a rice and beans dish made with instant brown rice, a can of low-sodium black beans, and a can of tomatoes with chiles.
- **Encourage children and parents** to eat together as a family. Family meals are associated with good diet quality as well as other benefits such as improved communication and reduced risk of alcohol/drug use among teens.

Promoting Breakfast Consumption

- **Invite parents, grandparents,** or other family members to join children at school breakfasts.
- **Teach students about label reading** using several different brands of cereal. Discuss which cereals would be the healthiest choices.

- **Create a breakfast recipe contest.** Children and their families can submit their favorite healthful and creative recipes. Select a few winners to receive small prizes. In a school setting, all the recipes can be compiled into a cookbook that can be sold to families as a fundraiser.
- **Provide paper plates for children** to draw on and ask them to color a healthful breakfast that contains at least three food groups.
- **Use the free Dannon Institute *Breakfast Is for Going and Growing!*** printable coloring book (http://www.celebratehealthyeating.org/pdf/brk/color_book.pdf).
- **Play a breakfast version of *Family Feud* or *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*.**
- **Conduct a focus group.** Bring in nutritious breakfast foods and ask children to rate the appearance, taste, and texture on a worksheet. Let the group vote on their favorite overall choice.