



Factors Influencing Healthy Eating

Grade 6 | Making Healthy Choices

Learning Goals

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- use critical and creative thinking skills to help them demonstrate their knowledge of medical, emotional, practical and societal factors that influence eating habits and food choices to develop personal guidelines for healthier eating.

Facility

Classroom

Equipment List

Chart paper and markers

 [Teacher Resource 1: Case Study Anecdotal Recording Chart](#)

 [Student Resource 1: What Does Food Mean to You?](#)

 [Student Resource 2: Case Studies](#)

 [Student Resource 3: SMART Goals](#)



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Minds On

Share and clarify the lesson Learning Goal in a large-group discussion.

Hand out Student Resource 1: What Does Food Mean to You? to each student and instruct them to work individually to complete it.

Upon their completion of the worksheet, organize the students into pairs and use the Think Pair Share Square Strategy (see Appendix) to compare and contrast student ideas. During the “square”, direct each pair to join another pair and in their new groups of four to circle the words that indicate they had similar food choices.

Using large-group discussion, have student groups share what they learned about themselves, their partners and their groups regarding food choices when they completed the activity.

Circulate and provide effective verbal feedback relating to food influences.

A&E - Minds On

Teacher observation with descriptive verbal feedback of the students’ ability to identify favourite foods and reflect on how the foods are influenced by and associated with specific events or activities



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Action

On chart paper posted around the room, display the headings Medical, Social, Emotional and Societal.

Using a large-group discussion, explain to students that these are factors that contribute to what and when people choose to eat or not. Challenge students to think with their partner how these examples can influence other choices in our lives (e.g., choices related to smoking, fashion, personal hobbies). Invite students to share their responses verbally with the class.

Organize students into four groups and explain that the groups will rotate to each piece of chart paper in a carousel format and will list examples of factors that would influence their food choices and/or the reasons for eating or not.

Student response: “For medical, I have to be very careful with my food selections because of my peanut allergy, and often if I’m not sure what is in the food, I don’t eat it.”; “A practical reason to avoid crunchy food would be my braces.”; “When my family celebrates Ramadan, we don’t eat when the sun is up. That’s a societal reason.”; “Emotional reasons for eating might include a person’s food likes and dislikes, the amount of stress he or she is under, celebrations and using food as a reward.”

Using a large-group discussion, review the student answers and the ways that each factor could lead to either a healthier or less-healthy food choice. Circle each less-healthy food choice and direct students to brainstorm ways that they could modify it to create a healthier eating experience. Record both the less healthy food choice and the modification on the board.

Student response: “My mom makes us a cake to celebrate when we get good grades – maybe we could ask for a healthier treat or something that isn’t food related.”

Direct the students to regroup into their groups of four from earlier in the lesson. Distribute Student Resource 2: Case Studies to each group and direct students to work collaboratively to answer the questions.

Circulate to provide effective feedback.



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A&E - Action

Teacher observation of students' ability to use critical thinking skills to determine the factors that influence eating habits and to create solutions to assist students in developing healthier eating practices, using Teacher Resource 1: Case Study Anecdotal Recording Chart

Consolidation

Using a large-group discussion, explain/review goal-setting for students, using the SMART goal-setting process (see Notes to Teacher).

Distribute Student Resource 3: SMART Goals to students and ask them to highlight the key words and/or phrases for each step of the goal-setting process. Explain that this process will be used to help them create their own personal healthy eating goal.

Using the Popcorn Strategy (see Appendix), challenge students to identify other areas in their life where they may need a strategy like SMART goals to help them to make healthy decisions. Following the discussion, instruct students to work individually to complete this activity.

Circulate and provide effective verbal feedback while students are developing their healthy eating goal.

A&E - Consolidation

Teacher observation of students' ability to use critical thinking skills to assess the influences on their food choices and make a SMART goal regarding healthy eating, using Teacher Resource 1: Case Study Anecdotal Recording Chart



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Ideas for Extension

Have the students write their own case study for peer reflection. Once each group has written a case study distribute the cases among the groups and have each of the groups identify:

- What is the factor associated with the eating habit?
- What can be done to develop a healthier eating pattern?
- Why is this case study relevant?

Notes to Teacher

SMART Goals

SMART Goals should be Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time-Specific.

Helping Children Feel Good about Themselves

- Promote a classroom philosophy that fosters the understanding that many body shapes have beauty and value.
- Accept children as they are, no matter their weight, size or shape. Focus on children's abilities, not their appearance.
- Listen when children talk to you about their changing bodies and their feelings.
- Promote healthy eating and physical activity, but resist coaxing heavy children to diet or small children to eat more. Encourage children to participate in active play and decide for themselves how much to eat. Help them choose foods according to *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*.
- Encourage activities that promote children's self-esteem without focusing on appearance.

Factors Influencing Food Choices and Body Shape and Size

Children come in many shapes and sizes and make different choices about their food practices. A variety of factors influence their food choices, body image and self-esteem. To promote good health, it is important to foster healthy eating habits, regular physical activity, acceptance of individual shapes and sizes and a positive sense of self-worth.

Heredity

Different body shapes and sizes are among the things that make each person unique and they are determined largely by heredity. Some individuals and their families tend to gain body fat more easily



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than others do. Because body shape and size are determined by genetics, many heavy children will never be “thin.” However, they can be healthy, active people who feel good about themselves.

Being comfortable with one’s body is an important step in developing a good sense of self. Today’s culture can be cruel to children who are heavier than what is considered to be “normal.” Some children try to lose weight by dieting because they fear becoming fat. This action can be the start of restrictive eating in a fruitless effort to reach unrealistic goals of thinness and body shape. Professionals need to help children of all sizes understand and accept that to a great extent their bodies have been programmed to be a certain size and shape. All children should be encouraged to establish a healthy eating pattern and participate in regular physical activity as a way to feel healthy, energetic and fit, and to have fun.

Puberty

Just before puberty, children undergo a growth spurt. For girls, this spurt usually begins at about 8 – 10 years old, while for boys it is at about 11 – 13. During this time, 20 percent of adult height and 50 percent of adult weight are gained. Growth in height and weight do not always happen simultaneously. Some children gain weight before they gain height. Other children grow taller before they gain weight. The timing and the uniqueness of that growth spurt will influence their body shape and size. Preadolescent children need to eat adequate amounts and a variety of foods to prepare for rapid growth.

Yet many children between the ages of nine and 12 become dissatisfied with how they look. During the late childhood years, the body physiologically prepares itself for the rapid growth of the teen years. Adolescence is also a time when body proportions change dramatically. If energy needs are not adequately met, physical growth can be delayed and possibly even stunted. How each person grows is affected by many factors. Bodies are like computers that run on their own growth program. Each child is on his or her own genetically determined growth schedule.

Family Influences and Traditions

Parents are children’s most important source of information and influence about food and eating. Family eating habits, activity patterns and attitudes toward food and eating have an enormous influence on children. For example, if the family eats breakfast, it is more likely that the children will, too. Family income is another factor that influences what children eat and the food choices that are available to them. Families develop patterns of eating based on what they eat, when and where, to accommodate their schedules, family size and the activity levels of different members. Families may eat one or more meals a week in restaurants or from take-out establishments. They may use a large proportion of already prepared foods.



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Culture

The Canadian population consists of many diverse ethnic groups. This is exciting because it provides the opportunity to choose from a large variety of foods in addition to the traditional Canadian cuisine. Children can begin to learn about the differences in people's eating habits, likes, dislikes and cultural backgrounds. They can learn that people from different parts of the world can choose different, but equally healthy, foods (e.g., bread, rice, tortillas, roti). Discussion about food in the classroom should enable all children to feel individually involved by including foods that relate to their own food habits.

When discussing the food practices of multicultural groups, an understanding of the value systems of the cultural groups is required. Food habits are greatly influenced by the group's values. The perception of healthy foods differs from one cultural group to another. It is important that you do not make the students feel that one value system and food practice is superior to another.

When there is discussion around cultural foods, keep the following in mind:

- Do not assume that students from a particular group have adopted the food and dietary practices of their new country. Ask students to share with the class their food practices and the current eating patterns of their family.
- Children sharing food experiences can help establish trust, as well as knowledge, among classmates.

Individual Preferences

Individuals develop eating habits based partly on culture and family but also on personal likes, dislikes and idiosyncrasies. Some foods become associated with good times and eating them makes us feel good (e.g., cake, corn on the cob, candy). Sometimes we eat simply out of habit or because we are bored: when a certain television program comes on, out comes the popcorn or the bag of chocolate chip cookies. The main reason children give for choosing a favourite food is almost always taste. Children choose foods because they taste good and because eating those foods makes them feel good.

School Policies and Practices

School has an important influence on what children eat. School nutrition education programs are a key source of information about healthy eating. As well, school food policies can reinforce in-class education. For example, children taught in class about nutritious snacks need to see them featured during school events or in the cafeteria.

Allergies

Children and adults alike need to be more aware of and sensitive to food allergies. This means always



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asking about food allergies before sharing food. The number of life-threatening reactions to food allergies is increasing. These can happen anywhere – at home, in school or recreational facilities, at camp and on field trips. Make sure your school has a policy for handling these allergies and that you are familiar with it.

Volunteers and Professionals Who Work with Children A coach, a teacher, a camp leader or a group leader can have a powerful effect on adolescents through the example they set. Their unspoken example, such as munching on fruit for a snack, or their comments about weight, can strongly influence what children and teens perceive about healthy eating, body image and healthy living.

Peers

Peer pressure influences children of all ages and is particularly strong in the early teen years. Although pre-teen children identify strongly with their family, they also want to be like the peers they admire. Acceptance in a peer group can depend on eating, liking and doing the same things as the other children in the group.

Media Messages

Television viewing plays a major role in everyday life for most children and teens. Like other entertainment media, television reflects social values and shapes societal behaviour. A recent Canadian study showed that food and food-related messages depicted most often on Canadian prime time television did not support Canada's Food Guide. Foods shown most often were from the Other Foods category and tended to be higher-fat choices. Foods shown least often were higher-fibre foods and green and orange vegetables and fruit.

The media can be a powerful influence on how young people view themselves. The media delivers the messages that “thin is in” and a large body is unacceptable. Often body image attitudes on prime-time television deal negatively with larger body sizes. People with larger bodies are laughed at, marginalized and ridiculed. The media or corporate view of the “ideal” body type for women is now at the thinnest percent of a normal weight distribution. This excludes 95 percent of women in our society. The increasing pressure to be thin is reflected in cultural images. The typical female model weighs 13 – 19 percent below the expected weight for her height and age.

It is not always easy to resist the pressures from the media to conform to an “ideal” body image. The media often presents or creates false images of what people should look like, sometimes glamorizing unhealthy images. They create a distorted picture of reality by:

- frequently propagating myths and falsehoods
- normalizing and glamorizing what is abnormal or unhealthy



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- creating the false impression that all women and men are the same by not representing whole segments of the population
- sending the message that one must continually improve and that one is never good enough.

Physical Activity

When children are active, they are more likely to feel good about themselves and to recognize when they are hungry and when they are full. This allows them to eat enough to meet their nutritional needs and have the energy they need to be active. Children who are hungry or who do not eat well are less likely to have enough energy to be active and to get involved in activities that will help them feel good about themselves.