



Teaching kids about a healthy diet

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FUTURELIFE® Fun Facts:

- In 2010, Jamie Oliver stood in front of a classroom of six-year-olds to find out if children really knew what fresh food looked like. Holding up some tomatoes, Oliver asked: "Do you know what these are?" He was met with stumped faces until one boy shouted: "Potatoes!"
- As children grow, they gain knowledge and integrate concepts. Food habits of children are learned through family food experiences, education, and personal experience.
- During the early years, providing nutrition information and promoting positive attitudes about *all foods* would be ideal.
- Making use of activities and information that focuses on real-world relationships with food, are most likely to have positive results.
- It is helpful to include games, projects, or tasks that are age appropriate for learning nutrition concepts. Learning should be fun for children and the play approach to learning is recommended.
- Children should be empowered to make food choices that reflect the Food Based Dietary Guidelines.
- During childhood, nutrition education should be directed towards teaching children the knowledge that they will need to pick healthy foods, as well as the analytical and evaluative skills required to examine food and nutrition information.
- Body image concerns are common during adolescence. Poor body image can lead to issues with weight control and dieting. Obsessions with dieting and weight should thus be discouraged
- Meal skipping is a common behaviour among adolescents, with breakfast being the most commonly skipped meal. Thus the importance of not skipping meals, especially breakfast, should be emphasized.
- Discussions that respect independence, sense of justice, and idealism can lead to good responsiveness from teens

HOW MUCH DO CHILDREN KNOW ABOUT FOOD?

- In 2010, Jamie Oliver stood in front of a classroom of six-year-olds to find out if children really knew what fresh food looked like. Holding up some tomatoes, Oliver asked: "Do you know what these are?" He was met with stumped faces until one boy shouted: "Potatoes!"¹

- A study which surveyed 1601 Australian children aged between 6 and 17 years, revealed that 92% did not know bananas grew on plants.¹
- A third of 5-8 year olds believe that pasta and bread are made from meat, reported the BBC.¹

If we have a problem we have to blame it on someone, right? I think it is fair to assume that the ones teaching our kids to eat are the ones responsible for teaching them *what* to eat. We set the example when we buy food, stock the pantry and cook meals.

Tailoring appropriate food messages and delivering these to children at different stages of the lifecycle can promote healthy eating patterns, which would ideally prevent diseases later on in life. Negative connotations with food are instilled at young ages and can persist long into adulthood, so it is important to try to avoid this from happening. Teaching children about a healthy diet and what this entails can prevent unhealthy “fad dieting” which a lot of people resort to when they grow older. Messages can be tailored for toddlers & pre-schoolers, school-going children and adolescents.

TODDLERS AND PRE-SCHOOLERS

As children grow, they gain knowledge and integrate concepts. Food habits of children are learned through family food experiences, education, and personal experiences². Family practices are a major influence on what children eat during toddler and preschool years. During these early years, providing nutrition information and promoting positive attitudes about *all foods* would be ideal³. Education can be done informally and can be done at home with parents as models, making use of a diet that has a wide variety of foods. In order to promote the development of language, cognition, and self-help behaviours, food can be used in daily experiences for the toddler and pre-schooler in the following ways³:

- Labelling
- Describing size, shape and colour
- Sorting
- Assisting in preparation
- Tasting

More formal education can be provided at pre-schools, where teachers that are attempting to teach children nutrition concepts and information must take the developmental level of the children into account³. Making use of activities and information that focuses on real-world relationships with food, are most likely to have positive results. Meals, snacks, and food preparation activities allow opportunities for children to practice and reinforce their nutrition knowledge and demonstrate their understanding. Positive outcomes which are also beneficial in the home can be achieved by involving parents in nutrition education projects³. It is helpful to include games, projects, or tasks that are age appropriate for learning nutrition concepts⁴, further suggestions can be seen below. There is a wealth of material that can be found on the internet which can be used for nutrition education for various age groups.

Recommended strategies for nutrition education include the following¹:

- Action stories

- Songs
- Tasting parties
- Food preparation
- Vegetable and fruit gardens
- Puzzles
- Healthy snacks
- Social modelling of healthful eating by adult role models as well as peers can be helpful².

Tips for encouraging children to enjoy nutrition and physical activity³:

- Children should be empowered to make food choices that reflect the South African Food Based Dietary Guidelines⁵
- Messages to children need to be age-appropriate and delivered in a language that they speak, through media that they use, and in a manner that is entertaining and actively involves them in learning.
- Focus on positive messages regarding food choices that children can make.
- Parent, school and community teamwork is vital to encouraging children to make food and physical activity choices for a healthy lifestyle².

Messages for parents:

- **Enjoy each other while enjoying family meals³**
 - Keep meal times relaxed and let your child select which foods they would like on their plates, as well as how much to eat, from the healthy choices that you provide.
- **Feed their independence at meal times**
 - Each meal is a chance to let your child grow and learn to make some decisions on their own. Encourage your child to make his/her own food choices from healthy foods that you offer, and by starting early you will help them build healthy eating habits for life³.
- **New foods sometimes take time**
 - Sometimes kids won't take to new foods straight away, and you may have to introduce it several times and serve it in different ways. Kids are likely to enjoy new foods when eating them is their own choice³.
- **They learn from watching you**
 - By eating fruit and vegetables, your kids will too!

SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

The prime time of human development is during childhood, where it may be easier to establish healthful dietary and exercise habits during this time rather than later on in life⁴. During childhood, nutrition education should be directed towards teaching children the knowledge that they will need to pick healthy foods, as well as the analytical and evaluative skills required to examine food and nutrition information⁴. Children are greatly influenced by what others do, so family members can serve as good role models for appropriate eating.

Learning should be fun for children and the play approach to learning is recommended. In this approach, children should actively explore and experiment with objects, materials and knowledge. Examples of this entail real-life situations, such as⁴:

- Reading food labels
- Measuring quantities of food
- Recording and charting data, e.g. the amount of sugar in popular beverages or cereals
- Communicating with others about food choices

ADOLESCENCE

Adolescence is a time where individuals are trying to find where they fit into society. It is a time of radical change, emotionally and physically, and this tends to influence their eating patterns.

Body image concerns are common during adolescence. Numerous normal-weight teens describe themselves as being overweight, signifying a disturbance in their body image. Poor body image can lead to issues with weight control and dieting⁶. Not all dieting behaviours have the potential to improve health. Many teens use high-risk dieting practices that carry the risk of poor nutritional status and increased risk for disordered eating. Knowledge, attitude, and behaviour must be addressed when guiding adolescents toward attaining healthful food habits⁶.

As adolescents spend a large amount of time in and around schools, convenience foods that are available at school and in the surrounding neighbourhood can have a great influence on their eating patterns⁶. These foods tend to be low in vitamins, minerals and fibre, but high in energy, added fat, sweeteners and salt. Instead of telling teenagers not to eat these foods, one should rather focus on educating them on how to make wise and healthy choices. Using set guidelines, such as choosing snacks / fast food options that have less than 5g of fat per serving, are easy for adolescents to remember. One can also encourage teenagers to check labels to determine if foods are made from whole grains or if they are high in added sweeteners or sodium⁶.

Meal skipping is a common behaviour among adolescents, with breakfast being the most commonly skipped meal. Meal skipping increases throughout adolescence as teenagers try to sleep longer, attempt to lose weight through calorie restriction, and try to manage their busy lives⁶. Skipping breakfast has been associated with poorer concentration and school performance; poor health outcomes, including higher BMI; and increased risk of inadequate nutrient intake, especially calcium and fibre⁶.

Messages:

- Explain the MyPyramid Food Guide, as well as the rationale behind the concepts².
- Explain the relation of diet to the needs of the adolescent, as well as the influence on skin, weight control, and general appearance².
- Educate about desirable snacks, especially fruits and vegetables²
 - Teen-Friendly Healthy Snacks:
 - FUTURELIFE® Smart Drinks and SmartBars
 - Low-fat granola bars
 - Baby carrots / sugar snap peas with low-fat cottage cheese

- Trail mix (dried fruit with nuts and seeds)
 - Frozen yoghurt or juice bars
 - Air-popped popcorn
 - Sliced apples dipped in peanut butter
 - A glass of low-fat milk sweetened with one teaspoon of Nesquik
- As the diets of teenagers are often low in certain vitamins and minerals (Vitamins A & C, folate, and iron), it would be pertinent to discuss the concept of nutrient density, i.e. good food sources for certain nutrients²
- Discuss body image, heroes and peer pressure.
 - Boys generally want larger biceps, shoulders, chests, and forearms.
 - Girls often want smaller hips, waistlines, and thighs, and larger bustlines².
- Discuss calcium and vitamin D – many adolescent girls consume insufficient amounts².
- Low-fat dairy products may be helpful for maintaining a healthy body weight: 3 – 4 servings should be consumed daily².

Tips:

- Emphasize the importance of not skipping meals, particularly breakfast².
- Obsessions with dieting and weight should be discouraged².
- When needed, safe dieting practices should be promoted².
- Discussions that respect independence, sense of justice, and idealism can lead to good responsiveness from teens²
- Encourage eating meals as a family⁶.
- By developing healthful eating patterns at family meals during adolescence, one may improve the likelihood that individuals will choose to eat nutritious foods in adulthood⁶.

THE AIM OF THE GAME

If children are surrounded with never ending visual stimuli, it is our responsibility to equip them with the right tools to dig through the information and identify the good and leave behind the bad. This is a principle of life and it should be the same when it comes to the food we eat. Making sure they know what they are eating is the first step to making a difference forever.

WHERE DOES FUTURELIFE® FIT IN?

FUTURELIFE® can fit into the diet in each stage of the lifecycle:

- Toddlers & pre-schoolers:
 - FUTURELIFE® Smart Food™ for Kids and KIDS Smart Oats® is suitable for children ages 13 – 36 months. You can serve this for breakfast or as a meal at any other point in the day.
 - FUTURELIFE® Smart Drinks can be a nice snack during the day, especially for those children who don't like the texture of the powdered products, acting as a source of calcium for growing bones.
 - FUTURELIFE® Smart Bread makes for great on the go low GI sandwiches.
- School-aged children:

- FUTURELIFE® HIGH ENERGY Smart Food™ and Smart Oats® can be used for breakfast or as a meal at any other point in the day.
- FUTURELIFE® Smart Bread makes for great on the go low GI sandwiches.
- FUTURELIFE® Smart Drink and SmartBars can be used as snacks, or as meal replacements for those who don't have enough time to consume a meal. They are also really useful for recovery after sport practices and matches.
- Adolescents:
 - FUTURELIFE® HIGH ENERGY Smart Food™ and Smart Oats® can be used for breakfast or as a meal at any other point in the day.
 - FUTURELIFE® High Protein Smart Food™ is perfect for those individuals who partake in sport and are looking to increase their protein intake.
 - FUTURELIFE® ZERO and ZERO WITH OATS is suitable for teens that are a little more conscious of their weight and want to limit fat and overall energy intake.
 - FUTURELIFE® Smart Bread makes for great on the go low GI sandwiches.
 - FUTURELIFE® Smart Drink and SmartBars can be used as snacks, or as meal replacements for those who don't have enough time to consume a meal. They are also really useful for recovery after sport practices and matches.

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