

Elementary Program

Key Topics and Core Concepts

Program Philosophy

The Nurture curriculum reinforces general nutrition guidelines as set forth by the USDA 2010 Dietary Guidelines. It does not promote the exclusion of any food group or strict consumption of select “superfoods”. The Nurture nutrition message is broad; its primary goals are to emphasize balance and promote a healthy relationship with food. To learn more about the 2010 Dietary Guidelines visit: <http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/DGAs2010-PolicyDocument.htm>

MyPlate was created by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to help Americans understand the foundation of a healthy diet. To learn more about MyPlate, please visit: www.choosemyplate.gov

Key Topics and Core Concepts

Key Topic: Eat Mainly Foods that Nourish Your Body

Go Foods, Slow Foods, and Wannabes

Nurture believes in promoting a positive relationship with food, therefore, it uses the word “slow” rather than “bad” when referring to nutrient-poor foods. Why? Using the word ‘bad’ often inflicts a sense of shame. This sets the stage for an unhealthy relationship with food. The Go or Slow lesson promotes a healthy relationship with food by focusing on how energized the body feels after eating Go Foods. Energy is a buzz word that kids love. Energy implies movement, liveliness, and fun. Slow foods, on the other hand, often cause sleepiness. Not many children want to feel sleepy!

Go Foods provide healthy sustainable energy, tend to be minimally processed, and include things like whole grains, lean proteins, fruits and vegetables, and lean dairy.

Slow Foods may provide a quick burst of energy, but then slow you down. They are usually high in unhealthy fats, salt, or sugar and tend to be heavily processed such as chips, fried chicken, ice cream, cookies, and soda. “Moderation” is a challenging word for elementary students; “once in a while” is more widely understood. Slow foods’ can be a part of a balanced diet when consumed once in a while, and they do not replace Go Foods.

Nurture considers granola or protein bars to be a Slow Food, based on the USDA recommendation that "cookies, granola bars and similar foods be served in a *supplement* (snack) no more than *twice* a week". Many of these snack bars are high in added sugar and comparably low in essential nutrients. Finding nutrient dense bars requires the skill of label reading, which does not get introduced until the older grades. If this question arises during lessons students can be directed to more natural snacks such as nuts, dried or fresh fruits and Go cereals.

Wannabes are foods like fruit leather with 100% fruit juice, Froot Loops, fruit punch, sports drinks and other similar products as ‘wannabes’. They want to be a Go Food fruit or vegetable. After reading the ingredient list it is evident that they are not, due to small quantities, or lack of fruits or vegetables. Many also have added sugars or other Slow Food characteristics.

Fiber

Fiber is under consumed in the United States. Fiber helps you feel full, regulates blood sugar, and helps maintain a healthy digestive tract. Whole grains, fruits, vegetables and beans are good sources of fiber.

Reading Nutrition Labels and Ingredient Lists

Encourage children to be smart consumers by using nutrition labels and ingredient lists to inform their food choices. The lessons are designed so students acquire these skills at a pace with which they can be successful. This starts in Level 3 and is greatly expanded in Level 4 and 5.

Macronutrients; Carbohydrates, Proteins and Fat

These concepts are introduced in Level 4. Macronutrients are nutrients that we need in large quantities for healthy growth and include fats, protein and carbohydrates. Macronutrients give us energy by providing calories.

Micronutrients are nutrients that are important but needed in very small amounts and include vitamins and minerals. Micronutrients support our immune system and aids in normal growth and development.

Go Food carbohydrates are quick sources of energy. Carbohydrates are in all five food groups; some plant proteins, milk, fruit, vegetables and grains. Fiber, also a carbohydrate, provides little energy but should be included in a healthy diet. It helps create the feeling of fullness, regulate blood sugar and keeps the digestive tract healthy.

Proteins and fats take longer to digest than most carbohydrates. Strive to include some protein and carbohydrates in snacks and meals for balanced, long lasting energy.

Sugar; Added and Natural

The average U.S. child consumes around 22 teaspoons of added sugar each day, and a U.S. teen consumes nearly 34 teaspoons! A diet high in refined (added) sugar can negatively impact one's health. The goal is not to tell children how much sugar they can or cannot have in a day. The objective is to empower children to read food labels to determine the sources and amount of sugar in foods so they can make better choices.

Fruits have natural sugars and are considered Go Foods because of the added nutrients in whole fruits, such as fiber, vitamins and minerals. Students should understand the focus is to limit added sugars.

Impact of Food Marketing

Children are exposed to over 20,000 advertisements per year (about 55 ads per day). Many of the advertisements that are targeted to children are for food products. It is important for children to learn how to evaluate the nutrition content of food by looking past the food advertisements and asking questions, in addition to reading nutrition facts and ingredient lists.

Key Topic: Be Physically Active

While exercise is one form of physical activity, tag, sledding, sports, walking, etc can also keep us healthy. Nurture wants people to engage in the forms of physical activity that they love!

Five Minute Fitness Ideas can be referred to for the first few minutes of each lesson. This gets them moving so they are able to sit for the lessons attentively. For older or more experienced classes, the students love to suggest exercises,

such as jumping jacks or push-ups, for the class to do at the beginning of the lesson. A few of these suggestions can be used as an alternative way to exercise prior to the start of the lesson.

Five Minute Fitness Ideas can be incorporated into the day by classroom teachers as a transition or as a means of focusing the class. These contain some yoga and breathing exercises that can help students learn to decompress. These could be incorporated before important exams so students can relax and do their best.

Rest

Everybody needs to sleep. However, most experts agree that adults and children are not getting enough. With TV, computer games, and increasing levels of stress, many children and adults are going to bed later and waking up earlier. Sleep deprivation can lead to increased levels of stress, changes in appetite, mental fog, weight gain, irritability, anxiety, and/or depression. The importance of rest and sleep is mentioned in many lessons.

Key Topic: Eat a Variety of Fruits and Vegetables

Most Americans don't eat enough fruits and vegetables. Elementary students should get at least two servings of fruit and three servings of vegetables each day. Filling half your plate with fruits and vegetables can help students get to these quantities.

It is important to eat a variety, or "rainbow" of fruits and vegetables since each color provides different micronutrients that benefit our health.

Students love to talk about how to tell the difference between fruits and vegetables. Regardless of whether a food is a fruit or vegetable, **it is important to include them in the diet. They are filled with nutrients that help keep you healthy and strong.** This is the point to be conveyed.

Scientists classify fruits and vegetables based on whether or not they have seeds. In the health world, however, we classify fruits and vegetables based on their nutrition profile. These designations are used by the National School Lunch program, MyPlate, and in diabetes and other nutrition counseling.

There are numerous nutrients in fruits and vegetables, but one of the deciding factors of whether a food is classified as a fruit or vegetable for nutrition counseling is the sugar content. In general, a good rule of thumb is that if it tastes

sweet, it is probably a fruit. Most fruits taste sweet such as watermelon, grapes, apples etc. There are foods that are technically fruits because they have seeds, but taste more like vegetables such as zucchini, cucumber, tomatoes, etc. Nutritionists classify these fruits as vegetables.

Key Topic: Use MyPlate to Create Balanced Meals and Snacks

One of the most challenging concepts for students to learn is how to sort foods into food groups. This skill is necessary for creating balanced meals. Therefore, we encourage students to name the food group of foods that are mentioned during the lesson. Most confusion exists between grains, protein and dairy. Examples of these foods as defined by MyPlate are:

- Grains: bread, pasta, rice, corn, oatmeal, crackers, tortillas, etc. At least 50% of the grains consumed should be whole grains.
- Protein: meat, fish, poultry, eggs, nuts, beans, seeds
- Dairy: milk, yogurt, cheese

Nurture uses **actions** when discussing specific food group to provide students hints as to how the food group helps our bodies. We encourage the students to use these symbols as well.

- Vegetables – smile because they make our bodies happy
- Fruits – OK symbol with hand because fruits keep us feeling okay
- Grains – pump arms like your running in place because grains give us energy
- Protein – flex your biceps because helps us build muscle
- Dairy – point to your teeth because dairy helps build strong teeth and bones

Snacks or Treats?

Sometimes people confuse the word “snack” with “treat.” Snacking is a healthy habit that helps children grow. Because young children have small stomachs, they often need two snacks per day: one after breakfast, and one after lunch. Healthy snacks should include Go Foods from at least two of the five food groups: whole grains, vegetables, fruit, dairy, protein.

Key Topic: Pay Attention to Energy Balance and Portion Control

Eating mindfully is a strong tool for portion control and consuming a healthy diet. Many people base food decisions on societal inputs like whether it is “time” to eat, using food as a reward or being triggered by an advertisement. The Nurture Elementary Program encourages students to pay attention to how their bodies feel.

Levels 1 and 2 introduce the idea that you need to eat to have energy for activities. Students are encouraged to eat the amount of food that makes them feel good and energized: not hungry and not too full, full of energy and not sleepy.

In Level 3 students are introduced to the concept of appetite. They are encouraged to determine whether hunger, thirst, appetite or boredom is driving their desire to eat and to use that information to inform their actions. **Hunger** is a physical feeling of stomach pain or gurgling sounds or feeling light headed (spacey) and/or weak from lack of food. **Appetite** is an emotional wanting or desire for a food or beverage with no actual physical symptoms.

In Level 5, portion control is one of the three main topics and the impact of advertising on food choices is discussed.

Key Topic: Stay Hydrated with Water and Milk

Many children don't drink enough water. Dehydration can lead to headaches, nausea, diarrhea, fatigue, mood swings, and cramping. Note that there is not a magic number as to how many ounces of water a child should drink in a day (given the variability in activity level and size of the child). However, one can safely assume that most children need at least five cups of water per day. Water is the best beverage choice, followed by milk (or milk substitute), and finally 100% juice (no more than one cup per day). Sports drinks, punch, and sodas are beverages that should be consumed in moderation, if at all.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no more than one cup of 100% juice a day because juice contains high levels of sugar and, generally, little if any fiber. Encourage students to eat whole fruit and drink water.

Encouraging students to bring a reusable water bottle to school is a great way to encourage water consumption in an environmental friendly fashion.