

What or Who Influences Your Food Choices? Lesson Idea

Objectives

- Recognize that healthful food choices can enhance body composition and self-concept.
- Identify and understand the social, cultural and psychological factors that influence food choices.

Prepare

- Have students bring in a Nutrition Facts label from any food.

Materials

- Nutrition Facts labels

Explore

1. Have each student bring to class a food label or package that includes a Nutrition Facts chart. *Why is it important to check the serving size of a food when you read the food label?* (Amounts of nutrients are based on the serving size. If you eat a smaller or larger serving, then these amounts change.) If food packages are full, pour or take out the serving sizes listed on several of the food labels to show students different serving sizes. *What daily calorie intake is the % Daily Value column based on?* (2,000 calories)

Have students check the total grams of fat and the percentage of the Daily Value from fat for their food. Ask volunteers to name their food and tell the food's number of grams of fat and its % Daily Value from fat. Have students take notes about the different foods as they are discussed. List the information on the chalkboard. Repeat the procedure using the foods' sodium (salt) content. *Why do nutritionists recommend that we eat no more than 2,300 milligrams of sodium per day?* (High sodium levels are associated with high blood pressure in some people.)

Follow the above procedure, looking at the listings for total carbohydrates, dietary fiber, vitamins A and C, calcium and iron, on students' food labels. Continue until students demonstrate that they understand how to read the information contained on Nutrition Facts labels. Then ask students to consult their notes to answer the following questions: *Of the foods we looked at, which have more nutritional value and less fat, cholesterol and sodium? Which have more fat, cholesterol, or sodium and less nutritional value?*

2. Challenge each student to write a list of factors that influence his or her food choices. *Reading food labels is one way to decide which foods to eat. What are other factors that help you decide what to eat? Do you eat what your parents eat? Do you eat what your friends eat? Do you eat certain foods because they taste good or because they are healthful?* Encourage students to think about the reasons they choose particular foods, including culture and ethnicity. Then, on the chalkboard, write all the reasons named by students.

Discuss any sensitive issues that are raised, such as dieting to look more "attractive." Ask both boys and girls to describe changes they have made in their diets and the results they are aiming for. For example, some boys may go on a high-protein or high-carbohydrate diet to "bulk up," while some girls may decrease fat and calorie intake for a thin, "model" figure. Invite volunteers to describe personal experiences or experiences of friends in this regard. Do not criticize students' ideas about diets or body images (and do not allow other students to criticize those ideas either), but use the discussion as an opportunity to introduce the idea of different body types.

Have students research and report on the various body types recognized by scientists. What are the distinguishing features of those body types? What, if anything, can a person do to change his or her body type? Are there any advantages or disadvantages to having a certain body type?

Point out that every person can have the healthiest and most attractive body within the realm of the body type he or she is born with. *What are some ways to make the best of your body type?* (Keep in shape with a healthful diet and physical activity; don't try to change your body type into something that is physically impossible.)