

# IMPACT

 University of Idaho  
Cooperative  
Extension System

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## “Team Nutrition” Leads to Healthier Food Choices in Elementary Students

### *The Situation*

Childhood is the time when many life-long habits are formed, including nutritional habits. However, many alarming nutrition trends are being found among American children. These trends include:

- One in five children is overweight or obese.
- Only one in five children actually consume the recommended servings of fruits and vegetables.
- The most common vegetables eaten by kids in the United States are French fries, ketchup, and pizza sauce. Potatoes and tomatoes account for 55 to 60 percent of the vegetables eaten by children.
- Children get most of their fruit servings from juice. They average only ½ serving per day of more nutrient-dense fruits—like whole citrus fruits, melons, and berries.
- Over 50 percent of snacks eaten by American children are cookies, desserts, chips, salty snacks, candy and gum. Only 16 percent of snacks are fruits, and only 1 percent are vegetables.

In order to confront these trends, extension educators have collaborated with other nutrition personnel to share positive nutrition messages with elementary-age students.

### *Our Response*

Extension educators from the University of Idaho collaborated with staff from The State Department

of Education Child Nutrition Programs to pilot Team Nutrition in elementary schools throughout the state. The goal of Team Nutrition is to improve children’s lifelong eating and physical activity habits by using principles of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the Food Guide Pyramid. Multifaceted, integrated nutrition education was provided to build skills and motivation for the children to make healthy food and physical activity choices as part of a healthy lifestyle. The curriculum used was Community Nutrition Action Kit from USDA. Students from a fourth-grade class in Bingham County participated in eight classes that included the following activities: tasting new foods, learning different plant parts, creating edible art, playing nutrition-related games and relays, setting nutrition and activity goals, categorizing lunch items into food groups, using the five senses to identify foods, evaluating various lunches for the presence of each food group, sorting foods based on relative fat content, and making a model of a sandwich that included each food group. In addition to the classes, the students completed a school lunch survey and a pictorial food frequency survey before the first class, after the last class, and one month after the last class.

### *Program Outcomes*

Twenty-three students completed all three surveys. Additionally, four students participated in some of the classes but did not complete all of the surveys. One student withdrew from the class and three other

students enrolled in the class after the first survey had been completed.

The food frequency survey had pictures of nine pairs of foods and asked the question, “What food do you eat most of the time?” From the first to the last survey, the following food intake alternatives were noted:

- Fruit intake instead of cookie intake increased from 87 percent to 96 percent.
- Salad intake instead of French fry intake increased from 48 percent to 65 percent.
- Brown bread intake instead of white bread intake increased from 13 percent to 17 percent.
- Popcorn intake instead of potato chip intake increased from 30 percent to 70 percent.
- Baked chicken intake instead of chicken nugget intake increased from 43 percent to 57 percent.

Following the instruction, a majority of participants also indicated that they ate hamburgers (70 percent) more than deluxe cheeseburgers (30 percent), milk (83 percent) more than soda (17 percent), and spaghetti (78 to 87 percent) more than frozen TV dinners (9 to 17 percent).

Students were asked why it is important to eat fruits and vegetables. Responses included:

- They make you healthier.
- They help you grow.
- They help you see in the dark.
- They give you energy.
- They help you do better in school.
- They help you get strong.
- Without them, you won’t live as long.

When asked how they would make sure they eat a variety of fruits and vegetables every day, replies included:

- Tell my mom to give me fruit.
- Make a chart to remind me.
- Put a note up to remind me.
- Set my alarm on my watch to tell me when I should eat fruits and vegetables.

Activities that were used in the Team Nutrition program have been used in other elementary schools in Bingham County and were included in a sports nutrition class that was taught at Alpine 4-H camp in 2001.

## ***The Future***

Extension educators met with the director of the Team Nutrition Demonstration Project from the State Department of education Child Nutrition Program and will continue to assist Team Nutrition schools in encouraging students to make wise food choices.

## ***For More Information***

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