

Lesson 3.6: School's out: What will you feed your child over the summer?

Background (Read before you teach): In farmworker communities, both parents may work in summer agricultural jobs. Children may be left at home, in care of older siblings or other relatives who have limited cooking skills. After work, adults are tired and have limited time to cook.

Children and youth, especially those who are already overweight or obese, gain weight faster over the summer compared to the rest of the school year (Franckle, Adler, & Davison, 2014). The effect of summer vacation on weight gain in youth is particularly evident in Latino and black children. The reasons for summer weight gain may include less physical activity; more screen time; less access to healthy foods and snacks; overeating from boredom; and irregular sleep patterns.

Teaching Tips: This lesson is a review of key messages from earlier lessons, applied to a healthy summer lifestyle. Review lessons on using MyPlate, reading food labels, playing at home, and reducing sugar-sweetened beverages. Invite parents to bring older children to the class. Having older children present is an excellent opportunity to teach them how to make healthy snacks for younger siblings.

Target Audience: Mexican-origin families with young children, ages 3 to 8 years

Key Message: Stock the kitchen with healthy foods for meals and snacks

Objectives: By the end of the lesson, participants will be able to:

- Make a list of healthy foods to buy for their children to eat during the day while parents work and
- Create some quick and easy meals and snacks using MyPlate.

Materials:

- Two shopping bags with a variety of foods that are healthy or not-so-healthy choices (see set-up)
- White board or poster paper and markers
- MyPlate poster
- Paper and pencils
- Supplies for food demonstration (suggested Banana Berry Smoothie;

Handouts: recipes

Set-up: Collect a variety of empty boxes/containers of foods, such as microwaveable foods, chips, crackers, yogurt, cheese, bread (whole grain and enriched), milk, juice, and other beverages. Preferably all items are available locally. Also, bring pictures of other foods, like fruit, vegetables, and hard-boiled eggs.

Opening (Anchor): (10 min) Welcome! Review what was covered last time and ask if participants have made changes, based on their goals. Congratulate and encourage them to keep on making changes.

During the school year, it can be easier for families to set a regular schedule but summertime is often more challenging. Today we will talk about what families can do to maintain healthy eating and physical activity when school is out for summer vacations.

To begin the class, ask the following questions:

- What do children in this community do when school is out? Who takes care of them while their parents are working?
- Think back to last summer, what foods do parents keep at home while they were working? (Write this list on the white board or poster paper)

Lesson (Add): (10 min) Discuss the following points:

- **Say:** Many children gain weight more rapidly over the summer. While they are also growing taller, children who are already overweight or obese tend to gain even faster. **Ask:** Why does this happen? Possible answers include:
 - Less access to healthy foods and beverages: While parents are working, children left at home may be eating high-fat, high-sugar snacks and drinking sodas.
 - Less physical activity: Children are not participating in physical education during school vacations. Children may spend all day inside watching television or videos or playing computer games.
 - Irregular sleep and eating patterns: Without the daily structure of a school day, children may stay awake later at night playing videogames.

- **Ask:** What are some things you can do to help your children and family have a healthy lifestyle (access to healthy foods and physical activity)? Some answers may include:
 - Keep healthy snacks and beverages (sliced fruit, vegetables, plain or infused water in a pitcher or small bottles) ready in the refrigerator;
 - Teach and encourage older children to lead active games (jump rope, hula hoops, Frisbee) with siblings;
 - Maintain routines, as much as possible, such as regular bedtimes;
 - Enroll them in a summer camp offered through the city, school or other community group. Find out about free summer meals that may be offered at these sites;
 - To limit screen time, check out reading books with your children from the local library; and
 - Plan with your children a menu of lunches and snacks for each week, using MyPlate.

Activity (Apply): (30 min) While the assistant starts the food demonstration, the educator leads the activity.

- In groups, participants read food labels of several typical snack food items available in their local stores and sort into 2 bags: healthy choices or unhealthy choices. Together as a group, review the contents of each bag.
- **Ask:** why did you sort the foods this way?
 - Healthier choices are foods with more fiber and less saturated fat, added sugar, and sodium. Compare the nutrition facts label.
 - Apart from nutrition, consider safety issues. Does the caretaker know how to use a microwave safely (avoid burns)? Are there children under 4 years who might choke on certain food (such as nuts, whole grapes, hard raw vegetables)?
- Hand out paper and pencils and show MyPlate poster. In pairs, looking at the bags with healthy items, write several lunch ideas. Remember to plan a lunch with fruits and vegetables (1/2 the plate); grains, preferably whole grains (1/4 of the plate); protein (1/4 of the plate); and dairy foods. **Ask:** What ideas do you have for lunches?
- Food demonstration, tasting and sharing. Pass around the containers, showing the participants any foods that might be new or unfamiliar (for example, low-fat products, whole grain alternatives). Explain step-by-step how the food is prepared. Serve samples for tasting. **Ask:** What are some ways that your children can help prepare this recipe? How can you use it at home? What do you like about the recipe? What would you change?

Closing (Away): (10 min) Pair-up and set specific goals.

Revisit the list made at the beginning of class. Which of these items will still be on your list this summer? What else will you buy? What did you learn? Why is this information important to you? Choose a goal to work on this month (week). Try to choose a simple goal that is doable within a week. For example: "I will prepare sliced fruit or vegetables to keep in the refrigerator for snacks" or "I will reduce the amount of sweet or salty snacks in our pantry". Write your goal on the recipe handout. Ask a friend or family member to help support you in reaching your goal. Invite families to share their goals.

References and resources:

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