WHY DO WE EAT FOOD?
(Lesson Idea)

Objectives
• Recognize that foods contain nutrients the body needs.
• Recognize the role of nutrients in helping the body grow and stay healthy.

Prepare
• Bring to class several foods representing the various food groups: dry beans, a box of cereal, bread, an apple, a bunch of broccoli and a carton of fat-free milk. Or use food illustrations from the What Foods Do You Need? Activity Sheet.
• Download and print the What Foods Do You Need? Activity Sheet for classroom distribution.

Materials
• What Foods Do You Need? Activity Sheet.

Explore
1. Encourage children to think about how food helps them by asking the following questions: Have you ever seen a picture of yourself when you were a baby? How have you changed since you were a baby? Emphasize that one important change is that they have growntaller and larger. Explain that nutrients from food help them grow. Point out that nourishing parts of food such as vitamins and minerals are called nutrients.

Ask children to bend one arm up and feel their biceps muscles, and then feel the bones in their wrists and lower arms. Explain that nutrients from food help their bones and muscles grow and stay strong.

Have children jump up and down. Explain that nutrients from food give them energy to work and play. Ask children: Have you ever been sick and had to stay home in bed? Explain that most people get sick sometimes, but nutrients help them stay well and get well quickly.

Ask children to give big smiles. Explain that nutrients from food help them have healthy teeth, skin and hair. Write the following poem on chart paper and read it together:

I went looking for a nutrient,
I went searching far and wide.
Then I looked into my lunch box
And found lots of them inside!
Nutri ... nutri ... nutrient —
It’s where we get "nutritious."
Lots of things with nutrients
Are yummy and delicious!

2. Give children the What Foods Do You Need? Activity Sheet. Explain that various foods contain different nutrients that help their bodies in different ways. Tell children that proteins are important nutrients that help them grow and stay well. Have children look at the sheet and name specific foods that contain proteins.

Explain that carbohydrates in food give their bodies energy. Ask them what foods can we eat to get carbohydrates for energy. Next, have children look at foods that provide fiber.

Explain that fiber helps them digest food and helps keep their teeth and gums healthy. Explain that digest means to break food down into pieces that are small enough to be used by the body. Ask the children what foods can we eat to get fiber.

Explain that many foods contain various vitamins and minerals. Convey to children that some foods are richer sources of nutrients than others. These nutrients working together help us grow and stay healthy.

3. Display the foods you have brought or the illustrations: beans, bread, cereal, apple, broccoli, fat-free milk. Hold up each food or illustration and ask the following question: What helpful nutrients does a bean have? (proteins, vitamins, minerals) What nutrients does bread have? (carbohydrates, fiber) What nutrients does cereal have? (carbohydrates, fiber, vitamins) What nutrients does an apple have? (carbohydrates, fiber, vitamins) What nutrients does broccoli have? (fiber, vitamins, minerals) What nutrients does fat-free milk have? (proteins, vitamins, minerals)

You’ve seen that each of these foods contains different nutrients that help your body in different ways. Ask children: What do you think is the best way to get all the nutrients you need? Guide children to conclude that eating different foods from all the groups every day can help you get the nutrients you need. Suggest that a wide variety of foods is good and that eating too much of any one kind of food is not a good idea.