Why Is a Low-Saturated-Fat Diet a More Healthful Diet? Lesson Idea

Objectives

- Recognize that healthful food choices can enhance body composition and self-concept.
- Recognize the contributions that healthful food habits make to heart health.
- Recognize the personal benefits to maintaining a heart-healthy lifestyle.

Prepare

- Bring in two food packages with Nutrition Facts labels. Choose foods that are similar in type but have large differences in fat content, such as frozen dinners, pizzas, desserts, ice cream products, snack foods or cheeses. One food may be a low-fat version of the other food.
- Download and copy "Cut the Fat!" for class distribution
- Download and copy Today's Specials Activity Sheet for class distribution

Materials

- Food packages, “Cut the Fat!” and Today's Specials Activity Sheet

Explore

1. Display the two food packages with Nutrition Facts labels. Ask two volunteers to read the amount of fat grams contained in each food. Which food might you choose to eat more often? Which food might you choose to eat less often? Encourage discussion about which food might be considered a special treat to eat once in a while and which one might be included more often in a healthful diet.

   Why is a low-saturated-fat diet healthier than a high-saturated-fat diet? (A high-saturated-fat diet can increase the risk of heart disease, stroke and some cancers in adults. It can lead to excess weight gain.) Why is it important for young people to limit high-saturated-fat foods in their diets? (It is important to form healthy eating habits at a young age; a low-saturated-fat diet is healthier in general; too much fat in the diet can contribute to excess weight gain.)

   On the chalkboard, write the column headings “High blood cholesterol,” “Dietary cholesterol,” “Saturated fats,” and “Unsaturated fats.” Ask students to list where each substance is found. Which fats can help lower blood cholesterol? (Unsaturated fats can, when they are part of a low-fat diet) What helpful functions do fats serve? (They help you absorb vitamins A, D and E and provide energy.)

2. Challenge students to keep track of the fat they consume in their diets. Suggest that they write down all the foods they eat for one day and record the number of fat grams in each. Students can get the fat content information from Nutrition Facts panels on packaged foods or from the "Cut the Fat!" chart. They may choose to total their fat intake each day for three or four days to check whether their fat intake is fairly consistent.

   After totaling the grams of fat in their daily diets, students can see whether their fat intake is within the suggested amounts: 83 grams per day for the average boy age 11–14; 73 grams per day for the average girl age 11–14. (Amounts can vary for individuals.) If they exceed those amounts on a regular basis, what changes might they make in their diets? Suggest that students think of foods that are lower in saturated fat that they can substitute for foods that are high in saturated fat. Also, they might consider whether there are types of high-saturated-fat foods that they eat more often than they should, such as desserts or whole-milk dairy products.
3. Have students complete Today's Specials Activity Sheet. Point out that nutritional requirements need to fit into a daily and weekly pattern menu planning. Students will have to investigate the nutritional value of certain foods to make the necessary menu changes. Discuss students' completed menus, emphasizing the diversity of healthful foods that can be used to fulfill nutritional needs.