

Whole-of-school activities to promote nutrition

Whole-of-school health promotion activities using nutrition as a focus reinforce concepts taught in the classroom and help to illustrate the importance of nutrition as a health issue in the school community.

The following ideas are examples of whole-of-school community health promotion initiatives that are based on nutrition themes. The scope of these events is only limited by the imagination of the participants who plan and organise whole-of-school community health activities.

Planning and implementing whole-of-school health promotion activities can be a satisfying, rewarding and challenging experience. The last heading in this section, 'Other ideas...', provides practical suggestions for organising activities in order to share workloads and maximise the benefits for participants.

Theme day

Promote a health event that is happening in the community. For example, Healthy Bones Week, Diabetes Awareness Week, World Food Day.

Focus on the links between eating behaviours and how they affect this health issue. Ask classes to design and run school-wide activities that promote awareness of this health issue. Ask the canteen to support the theme day by preparing and promoting relevant foods.

Fruit + Veg Week – Conduct a Fiesta

Fruit + Veg Week can be held in any week that is convenient for your school. Use ideas from this section of the Manual or choose from others listed in the following Fruit + Veg Fiesta section to develop your own selection of activities. Don't forget to use this opportunity to get the whole school involved in a fiesta!

Eat your way through Fruit + Veg

Eat your way through Fruit + Veg is a class activity where students predict the amount of fruits and vegetables they can consume during Fruit + Veg Week and record their progress using fruits and vegetable stickers. Students keep individual records of fruits and vegetables eaten in their Fruit + Veg diary, and set goals to maintain and/or increase consumption levels. See the section that follows for activities and check your Fruit + Veg Eat It! Kit for stickers to use.

Whole-of-school healthy breakfast

Ask local businesses to donate foods (or offer foods at a discounted price), and hold a whole-of-school breakfast. For example, approach the local bakery, fruit shop, dairy association and supermarket. The canteen manager may be able to suggest who is best to approach. Organisations who provide support can be thanked in school publications.

Alternatively, allocate classes different responsibilities for providing foods and making breakfast, or charge a small fee to help with the costs.

Start the day with a morning activity session before the breakfast, for example aerobics, a brisk walk, Jump Rope for Heart activities, a fun run, a tabloid competition or other game. Invite local sporting identities to conduct activity sessions. Discuss with teachers the development of follow-up activities in class.

Healthy lunch day

Similar to a whole-of-school healthy breakfast, each class provides ideas for a healthy lunch menu and supplies foods for a healthy lunch day. Students could be involved in a whole-of-school physical activity prior to lunch or invite a local identity to talk to classes about how a healthy diet helped them to achieve their goals. Invite parents to assist in lunch preparation and to share lunch.

Canteen competition

There are many school-wide competitions that can be held involving the canteen. Arrange a meeting with the canteen manager to discuss ideas to promote canteen foods. If the canteen manager is on the school health committee, plan a meeting to discuss ways to involve the canteen in the promotion of healthy eating.

Examples of competitions involving the canteen include:

- 1 Invite members of the school community to suggest new items to add to the canteen menu. Conduct a competition to collect ideas to add to the lunch, recess or breakfast menu.
- 2 When a new food is offered by the canteen, conduct a competition to name the new food. Exciting, enticing and creative names for new foods help to increase their appeal and popularity.
- 3 Invite students to promote foods offered by the canteen. Students could make posters, write articles for the school newsletter or make up jingles or slogans. A prize could be awarded for the most effective method of promotion.
- 4 Conduct a 'name the canteen' competition. Students could be involved in making a sign of the canteen name and designing artwork to display in or around the canteen.
- 5 For younger children, conduct a colouring-in competition to promote food sold at the canteen. Display entries around the canteen or in other prominent areas of the school.
- 6 Choose a food of the week to promote. For example, promote fruit and vegetables that are in season and offer them in a variety of ways, for example pumpkin could be offered in pumpkin soup, cake and oven-baked chunky pumpkin chips. Arrange for the canteen to award faction or house points to students who order this food.

Staff health promotion

The promotion of staff health and wellbeing is an important component of a health-promoting school.

There are many activities involving staff that could be conducted, such as:

- 1 Approach community health agencies for assistance to organise blood pressure and/or cholesterol checks.
- 2 Invite the local dietitian to speak at a staff meeting or special seminar.
- 3 Set up a 'Nutrition Newsboard'. Pin up information about nutrition and encourage staff to bring in their favourite recipes. Strategically place the newsboard over a school photocopier, so staff can copy information and recipes. Newsboards can also be placed in the administration reception area and library for visitor information.
- 4 Organise a practical workshop on stress management and relaxation techniques. While this is not specifically a nutrition initiative, helping staff to prevent and manage stress can have an impact on their energy and enthusiasm towards teaching and the promotion of other health initiatives.

For information about other worksite health promotion activities which may interest school staff, contact the Heart Foundation.

Parent education and involvement

By educating parents about the health curriculum, health and nutrition messages learnt by children at school can be reinforced in the home environment. Examples of parent education and ways that parents could become involved in school activities include:

- 1 Conduct a parent education evening or series of evenings. Present an overview of the health curriculum and invite a guest speaker. Parents may be interested to learn about how their own nutrition behaviours impact upon their health. The school nurse and community health centre staff are valuable allies to assist school staff coordinate and run parent education. Ask parents about other health topics that they would like to learn more about in future education evenings.
- 2 Invite parents to healthy cooking sessions which are held in classrooms.
- 3 Invite parents to participate in whole-of-school health promotion events such as Fruit + Veg Week, health fairs/expos and theme days. Use school publications and parent associations to keep parents informed of health promotion events and encourage their involvement.
- 4 Include recipes from the Kids in the Kitchen Cookbook in school newsletters. (Don't forget to acknowledge the source!). You will find these recipes reproduced throughout this manual.

Food at special events

Organise the sale of certain foods on special event days. Involve students in choosing what foods are appropriate for different events. For example:

- 1 Fruit cups, frozen fruit ice blocks or energy packs on swimming carnival days.
- 2 Soup or pasta on athletic carnival days (if held in the cooler months).
- 3 Fruit cocktails and other nutritious snacks at parent evenings, school concerts, special assemblies and other school events.

Choose a day when the canteen is not operating, or check with the canteen manager prior to organising foods for sale.

School clean-up day

This event could coincide with 'Clean Up Australia Day', or become a regular event that is rotated between classes. Organise an emu walk to clean up all food wrappers and other rubbish around the school. Invite students to think of ways to beautify the school environment and to encourage other students to respect their environment and not be a litterbug.

School fundraising alternatives

Consider the range of ideas for school fundraising. Apart from selling chocolates, lamingtons or sausage rolls, there are a variety of alternative ways to use foods to raise funds for school equipment or events. Encourage the school population to come up with novel fundraising ideas using healthy food alternatives. Offer prizes for creative and original ideas. Some ideas include:

- 1 Students design and make a simple food show bag. Sample contents might include a fruit muffin, apple, fruit or milk drink, stickers, and discount passes for local services, for example the movies, local shops.
- 2 Students design and make a snack pack. Sample contents might include plain popcorn, nuts, sultanas, dried fruit and seeds. Students could test different snack packs to decide which is the most popular.
- 3 Conduct a food stall where different classes provide foods for sale. Classes could make Kids in the Kitchen recipes and package these for sale.
- 4 Make a nutritious food hamper from donated food and conduct a raffle.

Non-food items could also be considered for sale to raise money. For example, selling sunscreen, hats, stationery, lunch boxes or other containers, school calendars and clothing. Recycling schemes could also be implemented to raise funds.

Walk-a-thons and lap-a-thons are also great fundraising ideas which promote exercise at the same time. Classes could suggest refreshment ideas and prepare these following the event.

Other ideas...

A school health committee is a great structure through which to plan and implement whole-of-school health promotion activities. School health committee members could include teachers, parents, students and the canteen manager (the canteen manager is a particularly good ally where food is concerned). Ensure that the responsibility for tasks is equally shared among committee members.

Whenever a whole-of-school health promotion event or activity is planned, invite the local newspaper to come along to take photos and write an article. Alternatively, students could be involved in writing articles and providing illustrations suitable for publication. Share ideas with other schools by submitting articles to professional associations and education system and sector publications.

Use existing school publications to advertise upcoming health promotion events and thank the groups that contributed to their success. Use every opportunity to secure the support of groups for future initiatives. People may be more inclined to support an event if their involvement is appreciated and they are aware of previous success.

If attendance at parent education evenings is a problem, piggyback a short information session with an event that is usually well attended, for example assemblies, report nights and parent–teacher interviews.

