



Goal: Plan Nutritious Meals

Contributed by Lorene Hamasaki
Solano County Library

Introduction

Healthy living requires eating well and that means developing a life-long habit of preparing and eating nutritious meals. Like so many important things in life, this is easier said than done. Almost everywhere we go we are being encouraged to eat things that should only be a small and occasional part of our diet. We are all so busy. It takes discipline to go past the fast food restaurants on the way to the grocery store and buy foods that require preparation when we get home.

But the good news is that eating well can be both fun and deeply rewarding. Once you make up your mind to do it, a world of learning opportunities opens up for you and your family. We not only benefit physically from eating nutritious foods, but mentally and emotionally as well. That is because planning, preparing and eating healthy foods with family members provide opportunities for cooperation and conversation with the people we love. It can also provide wonderful experiences that teach you about food from different cultures.

Even though healthy eating requires some work and planning, the truth is that it is much easier to find and prepare delicious nutritious foods than it has ever been in the past. So let's get started!

Getting Started

To get started planning and eating nutritious meals, it will help to begin with a conversation about eating habits and ideas about what is a healthy diet. This helps to establish a baseline that will allow you to learn more and to make some constructive changes. It is also important to talk about realistic goals.

Very often people try to make immediate, big changes that turn out not to last very long. That is why just focusing on planning nutritious meals can do far more good in the end. By looking at your current diet, you can gain some ideas about how to make small steps to improve your eating habits. To begin with, here are some questions to answer:

- What do you think it means to have a healthy diet?
- What do you normally eat for breakfast, lunch, and dinner?
- How often do you prepare these meals at home and how often do you eat out?
- How often do you prepare a main meal and eat at home together with your family?
- Do your children participate in making meals for the family? Do you want them to?
- What do you think are your most nutritious meals?
- What meal or eating habit do you dislike? For yourself? For your children?
- Can you think of a single meal or eating habit that you would really like to change?
- What are some of the kinds of foods that you would enjoy preparing and cooking as a way to make that change?

Having cookbooks, food magazines or websites with you during this conversation will allow you to share with one another pictures of favorite foods, especially ethnic foods with which you may be unfamiliar.

After having a discussion like this, you will begin to develop an idea about what sorts of basic educational materials are available, what sorts of foods and recipes interest you, and what kinds of activities you can do that will help you plan healthy meals for you and your family to enjoy.

Books & Materials

Websites

■ **U.S. Department of Agriculture** -- has the newest food guidelines and you'll notice that the food pyramid has been replaced with a plate of food demonstrating recommended portions from food groups (see picture, page 4, in this curriculum). You will find all kinds of nutrition information here including suggestions for healthier food choices and regular exercise: www.choosemyplate.gov

■ **Mayo Clinic** -- has information on different food pyramids and an interactive guide to the Nutrition Facts label you find on packaged foods. This will help you understand what the food contains so you are able to make healthier choices: www.mayoclinic.com/health/healthy-diet/NU00190 or www.mayoclinic.com/health/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/MY00431

■ **National Institute of Health** -- The National Institute of Health's Lung and Blood Institute website has a handy list of healthy food substitutions to help you upgrade your food choices: www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/lose_wt/lcal_fat.htm

■ **Florida Literacy Coalition** -- has health literacy related material geared for ESL adults and family literacy programs. *Staying Healthy; An English Learner's Guide to Health Care and*

Healthy Living is a good resource. It has both a Student Book and a Teacher's Guide. You can download the entire curriculum or just Chapter 4, a clear and concise chapter on *Nutrition*: http://floridaliteracy.org/literacy_resources_teacher_tutor_health_literacy.html

■ **The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** -- has a "Fruits and Veggies Matter" website where you can enter details about yourself and the site provides you with customized tips to help you eat more fruits and vegetables, with examples of what counts as a cup of fruit or vegetable: www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov/index.html

■ **Department of Health and Human Services** -- go to the "Healthier You" link for a handy ready-made shopping list that you can print out and use at a moment's notice: www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2005/healthieryou/html/shopping_list.html

Books

Jamie's Food Revolution: Rediscover How to Cook Simple, Delicious, Affordable Meals, by Jamie Oliver. Published by Hyperion.

The Eating Well Healthy in a Hurry Cookbook: 150 Delicious Recipes for Simple, Everyday Suppers in 45 Minutes or Less, by Jim Romanoff. Published by Countryman Press.

Food Rules, An Eater's Manual, by Michael Pollan – An easy to use book with a short set of sensible rules for eating healthily. Published by Penguin Books.

Essential Life Skills Series – What You Need to Know About Reading Labels, Directions & Newspapers by Carolyn Morton Starkey and Norgina Wright Penn. This book covers what you need to know about reading food labels, directions, and recipes. It has words you need to know, exercises in comparing nutrition information, how to follow recipes and understand recipe directions and abbreviations. Published by National Textbook Co.

Essential Vocabulary Series – Restaurant Words and Essential Vocabulary Series – Supermarket Words. Both of these books are filled with easy to use activities to learn words associated with real life situations dealing with food, whether you are shopping for groceries, or ordering food at a restaurant. Published by Remedia Publications.

Key Vocabulary

nutrition	calories	carbohydrate
protein	ingredients	percentage
portion	sodium	artificial
net weight	ounce	saturated/unsaturated
recommended	processed	allowance
grains	grams	trans-fat

Reading Practice

Food Pyramids – Look up the different food pyramid options at the Mayo Clinic website (see the Websites section above). It lists various food pyramids, including the Asian, Latin American, Mediterranean, Vegetarian, and Mayo Clinic Healthy Weight pyramid. You'll also find the US Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) "MyPlate," which has replaced the food pyramid in the US as a representation of the ideal diet. Read through, compare and contrast the various pyramids (and plate!), and decide which one appeals to you. Below is an example of the USDA MyPlate and a chart with descriptions of the food groups also from the USDA.



GRAINS	VEGETABLES	FRUITS	MILK	MEAT & BEANS
Make half your grains whole	Vary your veggies	Focus on fruits	Get your calcium-rich foods	Go lean with protein
<p>Eat at least 3 oz. of whole-grain cereals, breads, crackers, rice, or pasta every day</p> <p>1 oz. is about 1 slice of bread, about 1 cup of breakfast cereal, or 1/2 cup of cooked rice, cereal or pasta</p>	<p>Eat more dark-green veggies like broccoli, spinach, and other dark leafy greens</p> <p>Eat more orange vegetables like carrots and sweet potatoes</p> <p>Eat more dry beans and peas like pinto beans, kidney beans, and lentils</p>	<p>Eat a variety of fruit</p> <p>Choose fresh, frozen, canned, or dried fruit</p> <p>Go easy on fruit juices</p>	<p>Go low-fat or fat-free when you choose milk, yogurt, and other milk products</p> <p>If you don't or can't consume milk, choose lactose-free products or other calcium sources such as fortified foods and beverages</p>	<p>Choose low-fat or lean meats and poultry</p> <p>Bake it, broil it, or grill it</p> <p>Vary your protein routine -- choose more fish, beans, peas, nuts, and seeds</p>
Eat 6 oz. every day	Eat 2 ½ cups every day	Eat 2 cups every day	Get 3 cups every day; for kids aged 2 - 8, it's 2 cups	Eat 5 ½ oz. every day

Food Journal - After reading about the food pyramids, you may want to keep a food journal for a week then read and compare how much of your diet comes from the various groups. After finding out where your diet needs improving, gradually work towards changing your eating habits and foods. List what you want to add to your diet and what you want to subtract. For example, add more fruits and vegetables; eat less salt, fat, and dessert.

Flashcards – Talk about common expressions or words such as: "made from scratch," "homemade," "processed," "ready-made," "convenience foods," "packaged," "natural," "artificial." Go over examples of abbreviations: oz., lb., RDA, net wt., etc. Make flashcards for these and other key vocabulary words like those listed on page 3.

Food Labels – Find a website or book to learn about reading labels (see those listed above). Read and discuss. Afterwards, bring in two labels from different brands of the food you like to eat. Read the ingredient lists. Compare them; check serving sizes; figure out which one has more sodium, artificial ingredients, fat, protein, etc. Discuss which one is better and why.

Recipes – Look for healthy recipes in cookbooks, magazines, newspapers, or websites. Read the recipes through and pick a few to try! Start a collection of recipes that your family enjoys; soon you will have several family approved dishes to add to your weekly menus.

Writing Practice

What do you eat? – Write down all the foods you eat, including snacks, favorite dishes for special events, meals you eat at restaurants, meals you cook yourself. Include packaged foods, frozen dinners, pizzas, etc. Highlight foods that you make yourself at home and cross out foods you buy ready-made, that contain many additives, or are pre-packaged. How many highlighted foods are on your list? Think of ways to increase the number of homemade foods you eat. Next, are your foods made from wholesome ingredients? How much salt do you use? How much fat?

Healthy Food Substitutions – Write a list of foods you eat, such as milk, butter, yogurt, cheese, meat, nuts, crackers. Think of a lower calorie, lower fat alternative, and write this down next to the food. For example: whole milk – low fat milk, whole yogurt – low fat yogurt, chips – plain popcorn, milkshake – smoothie made with fruit and yogurt. Write this down and use the list when you go to the store to help you select healthier foods. Be sure to look at the website on healthy food substitutions above.

Shopping List – A key to healthy eating is having wholesome foods in the home. Make a shopping list and be sure to stick to it when you are at the grocery store. Check out the Website list above for a link to a handy shopping list you can print out.

Menu for the Week– After collecting healthy recipes, you may want to involve your family in planning meals for the week. Divide your recipes into categories: Breakfast, Lunch or Dinner. Create a chart with the days of the week listed on the rows and Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner as headings of the columns (see below). With the help of your family, use this chart to create a menu for the week.

MENU	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			

Games & Activities

Bananagrams game, or Scrabble Apple game – These are two different games from two different companies, but are very similar to the Scrabble game in that they use letter tiles. They are simple, fun, and easy to use for all reading levels.

Recipe Exchange – Share your favorite healthy recipe with your tutor and ask him/her to share one with you. Read the recipes together and talk about the ingredients and why you like the recipe.

Experience Story – Try a Language Experience Approach (LEA) activity. Tell how you used a recipe and how it turned out, complete with reactions of the people who ate it. Have your tutor write down exactly what you say. Afterwards, have your tutor read it back to you and the two of you read it together. Then you read it aloud to your tutor. Circle words or phrases you want to work on. Make flashcards or sentences with these words or phrases.

Family Cookbook - Collect your family's favorite healthy recipes and make your own cookbook. Buy a notebook or album and use photos or pictures with the recipe. You may even want to write down quotes from friends or family members remarking how much they liked the dish. Add notes about the recipe. For example, what you suggest to serve it with or what you would do to improve it, etc.

Real World Practice

Farmer's Market Field Trip – Plan a meal and make a shopping list ahead of time. Make a trip to the local farmer's market. Try something new. Ask for a sample and compare prices. Afterwards, discuss what you observed and how you liked the new fruit or vegetable. Did you

buy some to take home and share with your family? How were the fruits and vegetables different from those in the grocery store?

Cook With Kids -- Do you have children or grandchildren who are fussy about what they eat? One way to get around this is to involve them in preparing the food. Find a simple recipe and read it and create it together or provide bowls of healthy ingredients that can be assembled by a child like "make-your-own-burrito," or "make-your-own soup." Afterwards write out the recipe together and let your child "own" it.

Independent Practice/Homework Ideas

Food Critic – Find a healthy recipe from a cookbook or website (suggested titles/sites above). Read the recipe and check for understanding. Try the recipe at home and then write a review of the recipe. You can use “star” or “fork” ratings. For example, one star, or fork: “Unable to eat; nutritiously bad;” five stars or forks – “Very tasty, low in fat and sodium; a keeper!”

Grow Your Own Herbs – You will notice the flavor of fresh herbs once you begin using them in your cooking. They can be expensive, especially when you only need a teaspoon or tablespoon, so read up on how to grow your own herbs. Look for a book at your library on growing herbs, and decide which herbs you want to plant. Buy seeds or a small plant at your local nursery or farmer’s market. Follow the directions on how to care for the plants. Enjoy!

Milestones

- ♦ **Initial effort** – Talk about your family’s eating habits. Look at the food pyramids and learn about healthy foods, portions and habits. Read and journal about how to make healthy food substitutions and think of how you can make some positive changes in your diet and cooking.
- ♦ **Making Progress** – Learn how to read and compare food labels. Start making healthy food substitutions and begin using shopping lists and having conversations about healthy eating with your family. Find healthy recipes, and along with input from your family, pick a few to try.
- ♦ **Accomplished** – You make wise choices in your eating habits. You have planned, shopped for, and prepared a healthy meal that you and your family enjoy! You are now on the way to building your own recipe collection of tried and true family favorites!

Contributor’s Biography

Lorene Hamasaki. Lorene has been involved in adult and family literacy at the Solano County Library Literacy Services (SCLLS) for 15 years. She started as a volunteer tutor, was hired as Families for Literacy Coordinator, and currently is a Literacy Program Assistant with SCLLS. She has a B.A. in Art History and a M.A. in Educational Administration. She likes spending time with her family and friends, cooking, and eating all types of food, running, hiking and reading.