

## Nutrition Education for Early Childhood

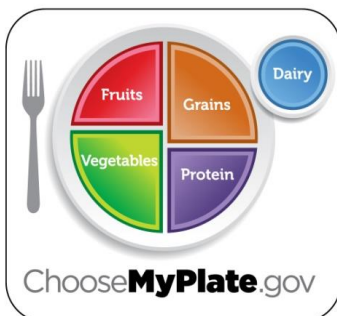
Eating well can make a positive difference in students’ abilities to achieve their full academic and physical potential. For young children, healthy eating is learned through actively watching and doing. By providing positive food experiences, early childhood programs help children to develop an awareness of good nutrition and develop healthy eating habits for a lifetime.

Nutrition is the study of how the body uses food for energy and growth. In addition, nutrition is the investigation into how nutrients affect the body to maintain health and protect from chronic diseases. Nutrition education in early childhood should begin to teach children the relationship between food and health and expose children to a variety of learning experiences about foods to help children develop sound attitudes and knowledge about food, nutrition, and health. Nutrition education should be:

- age-appropriate;
- positive;
- fun, interactive, and engaging; and
- integrated into daily routines whenever possible, such as mealtimes and transitions.

These lessons allow centers to implement nutrition education using a variety of mediums; including stories, play, art, movement, and taste testing. Each lesson focuses on a specific MyPlate food group.

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## **Grains - Student Chefs**

### **SUMMARY**

Children will learn about MyPlate and trying new foods through active play and a food preparation activity.

### **GOALS/OBJECTIVES**

1. Children will identify the basic food groups and give examples of grains.
2. Children will select and name different types of food using play food and pictures.
3. Children will make decisions to “cook” types of foods and name their creations.
4. Children will prepare a grain-based snack.

### **SUPPLIES NEEDED**

- *Two Bite Club* by U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)
- A designated play area as the “kitchen” or “restaurant” and set up accordingly with table, chairs, counter space, toy cook top, and other toy dishes and utensils
- Plastic play food
- Clean, empty food containers and/or boxes
- Ingredients for snack mix recipe

### **TIME LINE**

About 15 minutes for initial discussion, time for free play activity, 10 minutes for cooking activity

### **SET UP**

Create a “kitchen” or “restaurant” play area and set accordingly with table, chairs, counter space, toy cook top, and other toy dishes and utensils. Consider drawing a cook top burner on a large piece of paper and laminating for use as a makeshift cook top. Provide children with laminated pictures, empty boxes, or play food for children for “cooking”.

### **ACTIVITY**

1. Read *Two Bite Club* and discuss the food groups. Show children samples of different grain products (e.g., rice, pasta, cereal, bread, and tortillas) and discuss whether the foods are cooked.
2. Allow children free-play time to pretend they are chefs in the play kitchen center. They will be able to “cook” their favorite foods, and “cook” new food creations for their friends.
  - a. Ask children to name the foods they are preparing.
  - b. Ask children if they think this food will give them lots of energy.
3. Prepare the snack with the help of the children.

### **CLOSURE**

Encourage all children to try new foods.

## **MOVEMENT ACTIVITY**

### *Five Food Dance Break*

1. Play the “Reach for the Sky” song, available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/multimedia/kindergarten.mp3>.
2. Using the MyPlate poster, point out the food groups that are being referenced in the song.
3. Ask children to dance along and follow the song’s directions.

### *Breakfast on the Go Snack Mix*

- ¼ cup sugar
  - ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
  - 6 tablespoons butter
  - 1 cup oven toasted corn cereal
  - 1 cup oven toasted rice cereal
  - 1 cup oven toasted wheat cereal
  - 1 cup toasted oat cereal (honey nut, plain, or apple cinnamon)
  - 1 cup popcorn
  - 1 cup dried banana chips
  - 1 cup dried raisins
  - 1 cup toasted almonds, sliced (optional)
1. In small bowl, mix sugar and cinnamon.
  2. In medium microwavable bowl, microwave butter uncovered about 40 seconds or until melted.
  3. Stir in cereals and almonds until evenly coated.
  4. Microwave uncovered for 2 minutes, stirring after 1 minute.
  5. Stir in sugar mixture and banana chips until evenly coated.
  6. Microwave uncovered for 1 minute.
  7. Spread on paper towels to cool.
  8. Place in serving bowl; stir in raisins and popcorn.

### *No-cook Cereal Mix*

- 1 cup oven toasted corn cereal
- 1 cup oven toasted rice cereal
- 1 cup toasted oat cereal (honey nut or apple cinnamon)
- 1 cup graham crackers (preferably bite sized pieces)
- 1 cup granola
- 1 cup popcorn
- 1 cup pretzels
- 1 cup dried banana chips
- ½ cup dried raisins

Mix ingredients together and serve.

# Dairy - Milk: From Cow to You

## **SUMMARY**

Children will learn how milk gets from cows to our tables. It explores how milk is kept fresh and safe and the different kinds of milk and dairy products.

## **GOALS/OBJECTIVES**

1. Children will follow a food from origin to table.
2. Children will taste a variety of dairy products.

## **SUPPLIES NEEDED**

- *Milk: From Cow to Carton* by Alik
- Small cups and spoons for tasting
- Variety of milks (non-fat, 1%) and dairy products (*yogurt, cottage cheese, sliced cheese*)

## **TIME LINE**

About 15 minutes for initial discussion and 15 minutes for tasting activity

## **SET UP**

Check for any dairy allergies/intolerances in your class.

## **ACTIVITY**

1. Discuss where cows live and what happens at a dairy farm. If any students live on a farm or have relatives that do, they can share what happens on the farm.
2. Read *Milk: From Cow to Carton*.
3. Discuss the different types of food that are made from milk and offer students the chance to taste a sample.

## **CLOSURE**

Review with children where milk comes from and what products can be made.

## **MOVEMENT ACTIVITY**

*Let's Get Moo-ving!* Have children stand in a circle and ask them to:

1. Reach for the ceiling if you like milk.
2. Bend low if you like cereal with milk on it.
3. March in place if you like cheese.
4. Flap your arms if you like yogurt.
5. Jump up and down if you like ice cream.

# Fruits - Exploring Apples: A Multisensory Experience

## **SUMMARY**

Children will be taught that there are different types of fruits. Fruits can be identified by their unique shape, taste, smell, and color.

## **GOALS/OBJECTIVES**

1. Children will describe differences between fruits.
2. Children will explore several different apples using all of their senses.

## **SUPPLIES NEEDED**

- *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle
- Four or five varieties of apples (*include red, green, and yellow varieties*)
- Paring knife or apple slicer, small cutting board, bowl of cold water
- Small plates and napkins

## **TIME LINE**

About 15 minutes for initial discussion and 15 minutes for tasting activity

## **SET UP**

Have apples washed, and work space ready to slice apples in class.

## **ACTIVITY**

1. Read *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* and discuss the different fruits in the book.
2. Ask students to describe differences between the fruits (color, shape, size).
3. Show one apple and talk about its color and shape.
4. Cut the apple and pass a sample to each child to explore and describe.
5. Repeat steps three and four with each apple variety.
6. Ask students to color a picture of their favorite apple.

## **CLOSURE**

Review with children how fruits can look, taste, and smell differently. Encourage children to try new varieties of fruits.

## **MOVEMENT ACTIVITY**

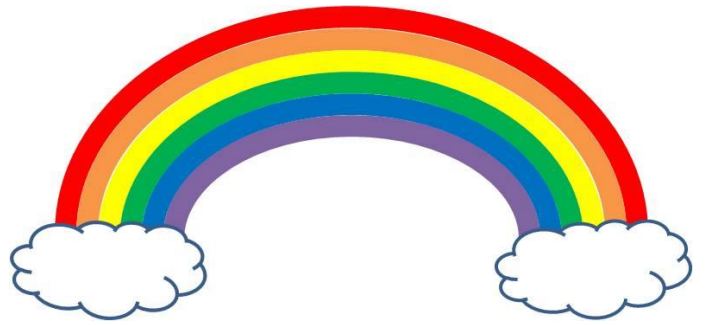
### *Rainbow of Movement*

1. Ask children what their favorite fruit is and what color it is.
2. Using the *Rainbow of Movement* cards, have children perform the corresponding activity.
  - a. Red: apple, cherries, cranberries, grapes, pomegranates, raspberries, strawberries, watermelon
  - b. Orange: cantaloupe, mangoes, oranges, papaya, peaches, tangerine
  - c. Yellow: banana, lemon, pineapple
  - d. Green: apples, avocado, grapes, honeydew, kiwifruit, limes, pears
  - e. Blue: blueberries, elderberries, black currants
  - f. Purple: blackberries, figs, plums, grapes



## RED – Superman

Have children put arms over their heads and “fly” around the room.



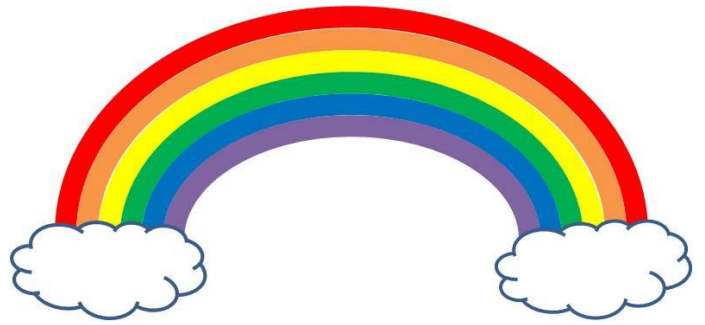
## Green – Leap Frog

Have children squat down and jump like a frog.



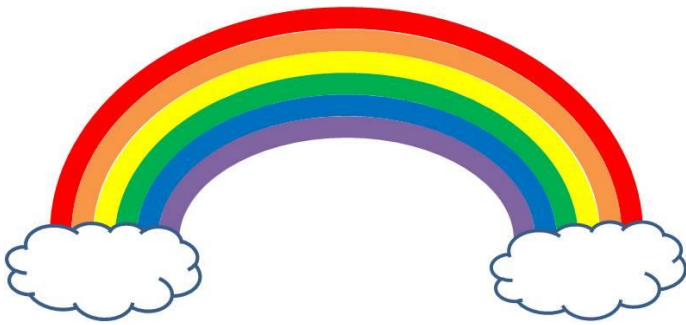
## Orange – March

Have children march in place.



## Blue – Bird

Have children spread arms out like wings and flap.



## Yellow – Twist

Have children do the “twist” by rotating their hips and shoulders.



## Purple – Circles

Have children do arm circles.

# Proteins - Seussville Snack

## **SUMMARY**

Children will be encouraged to try new foods and describe them.

## **GOALS/OBJECTIVES**

1. Celebrate Dr. Seuss's birthday.
2. Children will identify foods that are part of the MyPlate protein food group.
3. Encourage children to try new foods.

## **SUPPLIES NEEDED**

- *Green Eggs and Ham* by Dr. Seuss
- Cheese curds
- Hard-boiled eggs, peeled
- Hummus
- Sunflower seeds, shelled
- Peanuts or walnuts (optional)
- Small plates and napkins

## **TIME LINE**

About 20 – 25 minutes for classroom activity

## **SET UP**

Prepare food the day before and set up station on the day of the activity. Print picture/word cards for cheese curds, hard-boiled eggs, hummus, sunflower seeds, and peanuts/walnuts. Place and cover food items on the table, so the students cannot see the items.

## **ACTIVITY**

1. Read *Green Eggs and Ham* and discuss the importance of trying new foods.
2. Review the picture/word cards with the children and explain that each food will be used to solve a riddle.
3. Read the riddles to the class and have the children guess the answer.
4. When the correct answer is given offer a taste test of the food.

## **CLOSURE**

Review how important it is to try new foods.

## **MOVEMENT ACTIVITY**

*Dr. Seuss Says.* Instead of “Simon Says” use Dr. Seuss-inspired instructions.

1. Swim like a fish (*One Fish, Two Fish*)
2. Stretch like the Cat in the Hat
3. Run in place like Thing 1 and Thing 2
4. Hop up and down (*Hop on Pop*)
5. Swing your arm like Horton's trunk.

## RIDDLES

Won't you try it?  
Just one little bit?  
Will you please?  
I am delicious curds of \_\_\_\_\_ (cheese) \_\_\_\_\_.

Sam-I-Am likes me green,  
With your toast at breakfast I may be seen.  
For this protein packed food you will beg,  
You should eat me; I'm a \_\_\_\_\_ (hard-boiled egg) \_\_\_\_\_.

I come from a flower named for the sun,  
I am eaten by baseball players who like to run.  
With my shell on, I look like a black and white bead  
Be sure to try me, I'm a \_\_\_\_\_ (sunflower seed) \_\_\_\_\_.

This creamy dip is made from beans,  
It's great on crunchy crackers and veggies that are green.  
It is yummy, this I promise,  
Be sure to try me, I am \_\_\_\_\_ (hummus) \_\_\_\_\_.

I grow on a plant that doesn't get very tall  
I can be turned into a butter that is loved by most all.  
Take me out of my shell and enjoy a good crunch,  
What can I be? I'm a tasty \_\_\_\_\_ (peanut) \_\_\_\_\_.

I grow on a tree that gets very tall,  
I can be eaten as halves or chopped up quite small.  
Take me out of my shell and enjoy a good crunch,  
What can I be? I'm a tasty \_\_\_\_\_ (walnut) \_\_\_\_\_.



# Vegetables - Counting Salad

## Summary

Children will be encouraged to try new foods and practice counting.

## GOALS/OBJECTIVES

1. Children will identify foods that are part of the MyPlate vegetable food group.
2. Practice counting and naming vegetables by making salad.

## SUPPLIES NEEDED

- *Growing Vegetable Soup* by Lois Ehlert
- 1 cucumber
- 2 bell peppers
- 3 celery stalks
- 4 carrots
- 5 mushrooms
- 6 cubes of cheese
- 7 cherry tomatoes
- 8 peapods
- 9 croutons
- 10 lettuce leaves
- Salad dressing of choice
- Bowls
- Forks
- Serving bowls and utensils

## TIME LINE

About 20 – 30 minutes, including eating

## SET UP:

Wash ingredients prior to lesson.

## ACTIVITY

1. Read *Growing Vegetable Soup*.
2. Gather the food ingredients together and have children name the ingredients.
3. Prepare the vegetables:
  - a. peel and slice cucumber
  - b. cut peppers into strips
  - c. slice mushrooms
  - d. grate carrots
  - e. chop celery
  - f. halve cherry tomatoes
  - g. shell the peapods
  - h. tear lettuce leaves

4. Have children take turns putting each item in the serving bowl while counting the pieces to make a salad.
5. Mix all ingredients together and serve into individual bowls and enjoy.

### **CLOSURE**

Ask children “Is salad a yummy snack?” Ask children what their favorite vegetable is.

### **MOVEMENT ACTIVITY**

*Growing up!*

1. Select one child to be “sun” and provide with a flashlight.
2. Select one child to be “water” and provide an empty watering can.
3. Have remaining children sit on the floor.
4. Ask children to curl up and pretend to be a seed.
5. Remind children that plants need sun and water to grow.
6. Have the “sun” walk around the “seeds” while shining the light on the floor.
7. Have the “water” walk around the “seeds” while “pouring” water on the floor.
8. Whenever the “sun” or “water” provides light or water to a seed, the child grows taller and taller until all children are standing straight up with arms out.

This project has been funded at least in part with federal funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Team Nutrition. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the view of policies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA); nor does the mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government or the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

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