

Healthy Eating/ Active Living, Sleep and Mental Health



Alberta Education Health & Life Skills Programs of Studies Outcomes

The student will...

W – 7.1 Compare personal health choices to standards for health, e.g., physical activity, nutrition, relaxing, sleep, and reflection.

Teacher Background

In recent years, there has been an increase in understanding about the relationship between good mental health, healthy eating and physical activity. Mental health is a key element of a person's overall health. The relationship between physical and mental health (and the social, biological, environmental and psychological determinants of health) is complex and not completely understood.

- Physical illnesses and mental illnesses often occur together, e.g., depression and heart disease.
- The state of a person's mental health can influence the onset or course of a physical or mental illness. Similarly, the state of a person's physical health can influence their mental health (*WHO, 2005*).

Objectives

- Students will identify how choosing healthy snacks can boost their energy and support mental health.
- Students will understand the importance of how various healthy snack choices fit into *Canada's Food Guide*.

Materials

- *Healthy Eating and Active Living* for ages 13 – 18 booklets from *Healthy U* To order, email: healthy.u@gov.ab.ca and include what you are using the materials for, how many copies you need, and a complete mailing address.
- Additional resources: *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide*. Order on-line at www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide

- Teacher will bring in some snacks (pre-packaged and non-packaged) that will be used in the lesson, or the teacher could bring in labels or ask the students to bring them in. The Single Serving Packaged Food List resource provides valuable information. Go to <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/SchoolsTeachers/if-sch-nfs-single-serving-pkg-food.pdf>

Get Ready

One way to promote mental health is to take care of your physical health.

Eating healthy foods, being physically active and getting a good night's sleep help us deal with the effects of stress. Stress seems to play a key role in many mental disorders (CAMH - Mental Health and Addiction 101 Series).



Review the *Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth an Overview* at www.albertahealthservices.ca/SchoolsTeachers/if-sch-nfs-angcy-overview.pdf

This lesson will focus on ways teens can ensure they are eating a nutritious and balanced diet and maintaining optimal energy levels.

Activity 1: Healthy Eating and Mental Health

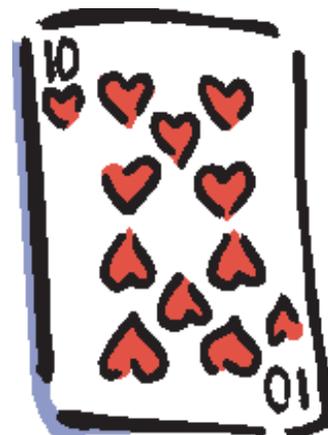
- Each student receives a piece of paper in which they will write down a snack food that they usually eat.
- Students will put their paper into a drop box. The teacher will have a student come up and draw a slip of paper out of the box.
- Review the *Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth an Overview* at www.albertahealthservices.ca/SchoolsTeachers/if-sch-nfs-angcy-overview.pdf
- The student will use their best judgement and put the paper onto chart paper into one of the columns “Choose Most Often” Choose Sometimes” and “Choose Least Often”.

The teacher will open up the program called the Healthy U Tracker on the Healthy U Website: <http://www.healthyalberta.com/HealthyEating/foodchecker.htm>

The teacher will demonstrate the tool with the students. They will use examples of the snack foods or labels that the teacher or students have brought to class. If computers are available to the students, they can try using the Healthy U Tracker in class or as a take-home activity.

Activity 2: Be a Card

- Organize the students into groups of 4.
- As a group, assign each suit of the card deck (remove face cards) an activity. E.g., Hearts = sit-ups, clubs = jumping jacks, diamonds = hamstring stretch, spades = push-ups.
- The group leader deals out a card, face down, to each student and the remainder of the cards are left in a pile.
- Each student turns over their card and will perform the activity that is matched with their suit, the same number of times that is indicated on the card.
- If someone finishes the activity first, they can help someone else finish their activity.
- If anyone receives an ace, then the whole group doesn't need to do their task, but they will run and touch the four corners of the room.



Discussion

Healthy Eating and Mental Health:

Healthy eating nourishes the body, including the brain, and supports mental health through (*Dietitians of Canada, 2012*):

- Improved overall health and vitality
- Increased ability to concentrate
- Reduced irritability and mood swings
- Lowered risk of tiredness and illness

There is some evidence that healthy eating may be a factor in lowered risk of depression and improved ability to deal with stress and anxiety (*Healthy U Alberta, 2009*).

Barriers that teens might have to healthy eating include:

- Not knowing/following *Canada's Food Guide*
- Filling up on sugary beverages and treat foods

Tips to overcome these barriers include:

- Learn *Canada's Food Guide*, serving sizes and numbers for your age/gender.
- Keep track for a few days to see where you might need improvement.
- Plan for your snacks, so you have the items available to you.
- Decrease sugary beverages like pop, iced tea/coffee, energy drinks, sport drinks, slushy drinks. Drink water and milk most of the time.

Physical Activity and Mental Health:

Physical activity can make you feel good physically and build confidence. Evidence suggests that physical activity may contribute to improved mood and increased self-esteem, self-confidence and sense of control. (*UK Dept of Health, 2004*) (Fox, 1999)

Some types of physical activity may provide an opportunity to connect with others and develop supportive relationships. Getting physically active may (*CSEP, 2011*):

- Make you feel better physically and feel better about yourself
- Improve your mood
- Improve self-esteem
- Reduce physical reactions to stress
- Help you sleep better
- Give you more energy

Physical Activity may be effective in preventing or reducing symptoms associated with anxiety and depression. How physical activity improves mood or relieves anxiety is not yet clear. Some theories propose that physical activity (*UK Dept of Health, 2004*) (Fox, 1999):

- Increases body temperature, thus relaxing muscle tension
- Releases feel-good chemicals that improve mood
- Offers a “time-out” from worries or depressing thoughts
- Increases self confidence, feeling of competence and a sense of mastery
- Provides a sense of belonging and mutual support when participating with others.

Barriers that teens might have to not getting enough exercise:

- Spending more than 2 hours a day on recreational screen time
- Riding in car/bus instead of walking more
- Inactive family

Tips to overcome these barriers include:

- Monitor your recreational screen time and plan for no more than 2 hours a day
- Get off the bus/out of the car a few blocks from home/school so you can get some walking time; go for a walk at lunch time
- Encourage your family to get active or find a friend to share activities with

Note: People being treated for a mental illness should not discontinue their treatment in favour of physical activity/healthy eating without speaking to their doctor.

Conclusion

Being mentally well includes looking after your physical health. Therefore, eating healthy snacks and getting physical activity are vital for a healthy lifestyle.

Take Home Activity

Have students pick a snack from home that includes a nutrient facts table and ingredients list. Using the Healthy U Tracker from <http://www.healthyalberta.com/HealthyEating/foodchecker.htm>

Have students analyze one of their favorite snacks.

Assessment Strategy

- Students will be able to identify some snack foods that fall under the category of “Choose Most Often.”
- Students will be able to identify how physical activity promotes mental wellness.

References

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