

LESSON: The Food Groups (US)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Define the different food groups and explain their importance
- Understand, identify, and recall examples of healthy food items from each of the food groups
- Understand and describe the concept of healthy eating and why food is important for our bodies

LEVEL:



MATERIALS:

- Activity Sheet: Level 3 – Build a Bento Box Lunch (US)
- Activity Sheet: Level 3 – Menu Activity (US)
- Activity Sheet: Level 3 – Grain Infographic (US)
- Activity Sheet: Level 3 – Produce for Kids BINGO
- PowerPoint: Level 3 – Food Groups (US)
- Quiz: Level 3 – Food Groups (US)

LESSON:

Starter: The purpose of this lesson is to introduce the idea of food, healthy eating, and nutrition, to bring students, grades 4-6, together and to have them start talking and thinking critically about these topics.

Section 1: What is Food? Why is it Important?

*Ask Class: What is food? *listen to response, build a definition together, recap and compare with the following**

Food is something we eat and/or drink to provide us with energy and all the nutrients we need to support our body's functions. Nutrients also help to keep our bodies healthy, moving, and they allow our bodies to grow! Nutrients are very important in supporting all of our body processes.

It is important that we eat good food to give our bodies everything they need to make them work! Your body is like a wind-up toy car and food is like the person winding up the car. Without someone winding up the car, then the car will have no energy to move anywhere! So, without fueling your body with food, you too will have no energy to move anywhere or perform your daily activities like running, jumping, and even thinking!

*Ask Class: What are some of your favorite foods? *listen to responses, re-group ideas to introduce topic of healthy foods**

So, we know what food is, and why it is important for our bodies – to help us grow big and strong, but what foods are best to choose more often? Do some foods have more energy and nutrients than others? Let's talk about healthy eating!

Section 2: What is Healthy Eating? An Introduction to Nutrition

Healthy eating is about eating the right amount of foods that we love, but what foods should we be eating more often?

We want to eat food that gives us **energy** and something we call **NUTRIENTS** (*Nutrients* - things in food that help us grow and help our bodies to function properly).

We want to make the **most of the food** we eat, foods full of nutrients. Foods like fruits, vegetables, fish, and whole grain bread are good examples of foods that we want to eat most of the time. These foods will help us to be healthy and strong.

But sometimes we want a treat, right? Treats are okay. We like treats, but we only want to eat these foods sometimes. We need to make sure we make enough room for foods that help our bodies grow and stay healthy. If we do not eat enough of the foods that are full of nutrients, it is harder for our bodies to work properly! So, let's limit treat food to make room for food full of nutrients that help our bodies work well!

Ask Class: Can I get some examples of foods we would consider a sometimes food?

open discussion of examples given, then transition

**List: Cookies, Cake, Donuts, Chocolate, Chips, Deep Fried Food, Soda, Candy, etc.*

These foods often have fewer nutrients in them, so remember, they are okay to enjoy sometimes, but we want to make sure that most of our meals are full of foods with lots of nutrients.

Section 3: Food Groups

We talked about what food is, what it does for our bodies, and the difference between foods full of nutrients and foods we only want to eat sometimes, but how do we make a balanced healthy meal? Let's learn about the different food groups and break down some food science!

Grains:

What are grains? Grains are a food group that provides our bodies with ENERGY. Grains have great nutrients like fiber that help to give both our bodies and our brains energy to exercise and think!

Fiber is also very helpful in digestion (*digestion* – process of breaking down food and nutrients so that the body can use and absorb it). We want to choose whole grains more often than regular or refined grains because whole grains have the WHOLE grain which gives it more nutrients. Try to make at least half your grains whole grains.

Ask Class: Can you give some examples of grains?

**List: crackers, bread, pancakes, biscuits, pasta, tortillas, bagels, etc.*

Ask Class: Can you give some examples of whole grains?

**List: whole oats, whole grain: pasta/bread/brown rice/cereal/crackers/pitas, quinoa*
Refined grains are what we call grains that have been through a breakdown process removing part of the grain.

For Example: A grain is made of three main parts* - the germ, endosperm, and bran. A refined grain would only have the endosperm left after going through a processing stage. Also, by removing the germ and bran, processing also removes some of the important healthy vitamins, minerals, and fats.

*Educators Note: Refer to the Grain Infographic

An example of a refined grain vs. a whole grain would be: white bread vs. whole grain bread.

Proteins:

What is protein? Protein is a nutrient we get from food that helps to BUILD our muscles and strengthen our bones! Muscles and bones are important for movement. Bones also help to structure our bodies and to protect our important organs.

Fun Fact: Did you know that you have strong muscles in your stomach to help mix and digest your food?

Protein-rich foods (*protein-rich foods* – food high in protein) have high amounts of important vitamins and minerals. These vitamins and minerals also help to keep us strong, healthy, and they help to prevent us from getting sick! Vitamins and minerals from protein foods, such as vitamin B12 and iron, help out by replenishing our body's cells and keeping our blood healthy!

Ask Class: Which foods do you think have a lot of protein?

**List: eggs, meat, poultry, nuts/seeds, fish/seafood, beans, peas, tofu, soy*

Fruits & Vegetables:

Fruits and vegetables are very important because inside them is fiber, VITAMINS, and MINERALS. Vitamins and minerals are very important for our skin, eyesight, and our blood. They also help us to grow and can help us fight sickness and disease!

Ask Class: Do you know of any vitamins and minerals that are important for our bodies that we could list?

**List: Vitamin A, B, C, D, E, K, iron, calcium, magnesium, potassium*

Fruits and vegetables play a very important role in our diets. It is best to get a variety of these nutrients in your diet to help keep you strong and healthy

Dairy:

What is the Dairy food group? Dairy is food made from milk! Foods from the Dairy group are important because they help to keep our bones and teeth strong. Dairy foods also have important vitamins and minerals such as calcium that helps to maintain our body and all its functions.

Fun Fact: Most foods in the Dairy food group also have protein!

Ask Class: Can you name some foods in the Dairy food group?

**List: Milk, yogurt, cheese, and plant-based milks!*

Section 4: How Do Oils Play a Role in my Diet?

Oils are NOT a food group, but oils do play an important role in our diets. Oils have lots of fats in them which can help to give our bodies energy. Fats can also help the body with important functions such as: keeping our bodies warm and acting as a cushion to protect our organs. We want to choose vegetable oils most of the time compared to other fats, such as butter, because plant oils often have more good fats.

Summary: Wrap-up and Take-Home Points

It is important to eat a variety of foods from the different food groups (Grains, Proteins, Fruits & Vegetables, and Dairy) to give your body everything it needs to grow and be strong. Make **half** your plate **Fruits and Vegetables** – choosing vegetables more often! Make **one quarter** of your plate **Proteins** and the other **quarter** of your plate **Grains**, choosing whole grain foods at least half the time. Have **Dairy** in your diet! For a refreshing drink, choose water often! Water will help to keep you hydrated throughout the day.

*Educators Note: For further facilitation, use the assigned quiz to recap the key concepts and test knowledge learned in this lesson.

Adapted from: [MYPLATE.GOV](https://myplate.gov)

REFLECTION NOTES:

A large, empty rounded rectangular box with a thin grey border, intended for writing reflection notes.