

Eating well for good health



Lessons on nutrition and healthy diets



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by

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Foreword

Everyone wants to be healthy and lead a full, active life. And most people know that to help them be healthy, they need to eat properly. Yet, many people make their food choices for reasons other than good nutrition and health. The availability of foods and their cost are often the primary considerations for people's food choices, but there are many other almost equally important reasons why people eat the foods they eat. Time constraints and convenience, religious practices and cultural traditions, personal likes and dislikes, everyday habits and lack of knowledge and skills all affect people's food choices. Whatever the reasoning behind them, the food choices that people make can have long-lasting effects on their health and well-being.

Around the world, millions of people suffer the consequences of poor diets. Diets that provide less food than people need, or an inadequate variety of foods or more food than people need may all lead to potentially serious health and medical conditions which can handicap people for life. Many of these problems can be prevented by eating a varied, nutritionally adequate diet. Tragically, some of these problems, such as blindness in children resulting from vitamin A deficiency, are not reversible once they happen, although they are preventable through proper diets.

To eat well for good health, people need the knowledge and the practical skills to make the best food choices possible and to practise good, life-long eating habits. Both in circumstances where food choice is limited and where food choice is seemingly limitless, understanding the body's food needs and knowing the nutritional value of foods can help people prepare more healthful meals and follow good diets.

Even with the best of intentions, however, it is not always so easy for people to know which food choices or dietary practices are the best for them. Access to scientifically sound and easily understandable information on nutrition and diets is often a problem. For some people, there is little or no information available; for others there may be too much or conflicting information. Nutritional science is constantly developing, sometimes creating confusion among consumers, as new discoveries replace previous information and advice. In the media and on the web, information on diets and nutrition abounds, much of it not adequately interpreted and some of it not scientifically well-founded. And much information, good and bad, is passed around informally, as people share their own theories on nutrition and healthy diets.

It is to address this lack of good information on healthy diets and eating habits that these lessons have been developed. The lessons provide a simple presentation of basic information on food, nutrition and health to help people understand the connection between what they eat and their health. The purpose is not to train people to be nutritionists, but to help them improve their everyday skills in making good food choices, planning and preparing healthful meals, protecting the quality and safety of the foods they eat and in establishing healthful personal habits and lifestyles.

Aimed primarily at the middle and secondary school level, the lessons can be used by students and teachers in the classroom, individuals outside the classroom and by groups in non-formal settings. The approach is activity-based, with less emphasis on reading and more on learning by doing, with a variety of activities, exercises, investigations and analysis that can be done in groups or individually. In all, over 140 activity sheets and fact sheets are provided to help make learning easier and, it is hoped, more enjoyable.

The lessons were originally designed for the web, in order to reach a wide audience. The print version has been prepared with the recognition that many users and most classrooms around the world do not have easy access to computers and the internet. Readers are invited to also visit and use the web version of the Eating well for good health lessons on the *Feeding Minds, Fighting Hunger* website <http://www.feedingminds.org/fmfh/nutritionlessons>.

While it is best if good eating habits start at an early age, so that they can be practised throughout life, good habits can be acquired at any age. It is never too late to gain health benefits from following a balanced, varied and nutritionally adequate diet. It is hoped that these lessons will provide a basic foundation to help and encourage people of all ages to eat well and be as healthy as they can be.

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