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Family First

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Family First: Food Guide Pyramid Musical Program

New Program Teaches Children About Healthy Living



Cindy Hsu (http://wcbstv.com/bios/local_bio_201171407.html)
Reporting

(CBS) NEW YORK As Former President Clinton tries to fight childhood obesity by limiting the amount of soda sold in schools, there's a unique program underway in some New York City schools that's actually fun for kids.

The New Food Guide Pyramid Musical Program teaches children about nutrition and exercise both in the classroom and on stage.

Helen Butleroff Leahy explains.

What prompted you to do this musical?

I was interested in reducing overweight and obesity in minority public school children and felt that children would respond well and learn nutritional education if it were presented in an entertaining way.

I am a Registered Dietitian, with a private practice, but also have an extensive background in theater as Broadway dancer, director, choreographer, Rockette and felt I could combine my skills by creating a nutrition musical called "The New Food Guide Pyramid Musical". I created a story line that covered all the nutrition principles of MyPyramid (The New Food Guide Pyramid) and approached my co-writer Roumel Reaux, Broadway performer, who then provided rap dialogue and original music for our play that children would relate to.

I also felt if children actually participated in the musical that they would benefit from the physical activity of rehearsals. In addition, the rest of the school would benefit from the nutrition messages of "The New Food Guide Pyramid Musical" since they would be attending the performance.

The Ficalora Foundation has funded this nutrition/physical fitness initiative in 8 other public schools. The program has won "The Certificate of Achievement" from The NYS Dept of Health.

How are the students reacting?

In the 8 schools (720 students) where the program has been implemented so far there is an incredible amount of enthusiasm. The first part of each class starts with a nutrition lesson followed by rehearsals for the show. The children are very responsive to both parts of the lesson. In the rehearsal process I see students learn to be disciplined, yet they still maintain a sense of camaraderie with each other, except for the occasional push and shove to get on stage from the wings! Teamwork is being developed. In addition, the students are so enthused that they all want to help me in any way they can- 95% of them raising their hands to answer nutrition questions, begging me to let them help me with the props, and excited about each time they get to do their dance number from "el toppo"- that's what I call "from the beginning".

What are the 5 top things you wish more kids knew about nutrition?

1) It is important to consume fewer foods high in saturated fat. - In their terms: to eat fewer hamburgers, French fries, hot dogs, salami, bologna- and replace them with healthy food choices such as roasted/grilled chicken (no skin), turkey (no skin), fish and beans. In addition, drink low fat milk rather than whole milk. Low fat milk has the same amount of protein, carbohydrates and calcium- it's just missing the fat. Children that eat a high saturated fat diet risk not only weight gain, but also early development of coronary artery disease.

2) It is important to know what one serving of a food looks like-and learn to choose appropriate portion sizes. In this supersized world of food we live in, children are unaware what one serving size represents- for example; one serving of meat is 3oz- or the size of a deck of cards!

3) It is important to eat more fruits and vegetables- at least 5 a day (combined)- and consume many varieties within these two food groups. In our show, we do a "fruit basketball rap" that names over 50 delicious fruits. Fruit choices should not be

limited to an apple, a banana or orange!

4) There are five basic food groups as stated in MyPyramid- orange for grains, blue for dairy, green for vegetables, red for fruit, and purple for meats/beans- and that children should consume foods from each of these food groups daily.

5) Sweets such as candy, cakes, cookies and pies should be eaten minimally. Most are loaded with empty calories, and are high in saturated fats, which promote weight gain and coronary disease. A better dessert choice is a piece of fresh fruit-you can even freeze some fruits like a Popsicle, and they are loaded with vitamins, energy and fiber.

What would surprise parents about The New Food Guide Pyramid- called MyPyramid?

1--It is so easy to get nutrition information for your child at the MyPyramid.gov website. You will be pleasantly surprised. Don't be afraid of going to the website! All you do is type in the age, sex and activity level of your child and up pops on the screen how much you should serve your child daily of meats, vegetables, milk, fruit and grains. Following these guidelines can help your children consume a healthy, balanced diet and prevent them from becoming overweight.

2-MyPyramid is not just a list of food groups as in the older version of the pyramid!

A-The New Food Guide Pyramid, "MyPyramid", offers many nutrition tips that can help prevent children from becoming overweight or obese such as:

1--Drink low fat milk: Don't worry parents! - you are not depriving your child by giving him/her low fat milk 1% or 2%. Low fat milk contains the same amount of protein, carbohydrates, and vitamins as whole milk- without the fat- the saturated fat! Products lower in fat are lower in calories since 1 gram of fat =9 calories- it adds up! Eating low fat products can help prevent children from becoming overweight. One glass of low fat milk is 90 calories; one glass of whole milk is 150 calories!

Take home message for parents: Low fat milk provides all the nutrients that whole milk has- minus the fat. You are not depriving your child nutritionally- and by consuming low fat dairy products you can help prevent your child from becoming overweight. In addition, new studies suggest the calcium in milk also prevents

weight gain.

2-- MyPyramid recommends to make at least half the grains you consume whole grain products- white bread, and even multi grain bread may be not made from whole grain flour. The surprise is that multigrain is usually not made from whole grains! We all buy multigrain breads- and generally they are made from white flour that has some grains sprinkled in. The nutrition label must say "whole". It is the whole grain that contains the whole kernel- with the necessary vitamins and fiber. Food with fiber, like whole grains can make you feel fuller and be helpful in preventing weight gain. Examples of whole grain foods are whole wheat bread, oatmeal, and brown rice- remember – the operative word is whole.

Take home message- whole grain foods like whole wheat bread on sandwiches can help prevent children from becoming overweight.

B--MyPyramid offers more than nutrition information- In the photo of MyPyramid there is a man climbing up the side the pyramid- he is specifically there to show the importance of exercise for good health and prevention of obesity.

Recommendations for how much exercise your child should do are included along with the nutrition information.

V--How much exercise do kids need- and give advice on new things to try

Children should exercise 60 minutes a day or more.

Most of us already know that children have to spend less time at the computer and TV- and more time at sports, dance, and calisthenics. Some people with limited budgets can't afford dance lessons, Thai Chi lessons, baseball uniforms and expensive tennis clubs. The good news is that there are many activities right here in NYC that are very inexpensive or free that can be done by the whole family. For example:

1--Why not explore other boroughs than your own- we have five! For example- let's say you live in the Bronx. Take the kids to Brooklyn on the subway and go to Prospect Park and walk through it- it's very large and you'll be doing a lot of walking! Across the street from Prospect Park are The Botanical Gardens and a Zoo- again- inexpensive, enjoyable, physical activity for the whole family. Too many times we get stuck in our own borough for activities. Venture out to another borough and remember- walking is a terrific way to exercise, and prevents weight gain.

2--Join the local YMCA- they have classes, pools and it's inexpensive.

3--Introduce your children to some "old time" low-tech activities like jump rope, hand ball, double dutch or hula hoop- some activities that our parents and

grandparents played helped them stay fit. Look at photographs of people on the street in the 1940's and 1950's- the population was by the most part near their ideal body weight. Not today!

4--Turn on some music and have the whole family dance together- free style movements! Introduce new music every week and set aside a time for dancing together as a family. (New music could be hip-hop, salsa, rock and roll, country western). Rent a "how to dance DVD/videotape" and have everyone in the family dance and learn together.

Advice for parents who have children that are overweight or obese

The best diet is the diet you can stick to, which generally is one that provides a balanced diet from all the food groups in moderation. Monotony is the main reason that people cannot stick to diets, hence a balanced diet- (as MyPyramid recommends) gives you the most variety and you will be more likely to make it a lifestyle choice that you will feel comfortable with and adhere to.

A simple rule to remember is that if you consume more calories than you expend (in exercise and daily living)- you will gain weight. Keeping that in mind, it follows that if you and your child are overweight and you expend more calories (through exercise) than you consume- you will lose weight. Remember also that the lean muscle you build up through exercise is "biologically more active" meaning that lean muscle burns up more calories and helps you lose weight.

Starvation style diets do not work- your body reacts by thinking you are starving and your metabolism slows down- and you don't burn up calories as fast. A weight loss program should be gradual. Consuming 500 calories less a day can result in loss of one pound a week- make weight loss a gradual, steady process.

Portion sizes are out of control! I have listed below what one serving of basic foods should look like. Keep your portion sizes to one serving!

The look of Normal Portion Sizes:

- * 3 oz. meat: size of a deck of cards or bar of soap—the recommended portion for a meal
- * 3 oz. fish: size of a checkbook
- * 1 oz. cheese: size of 4 dice
- * Medium potato: size of a computer mouse
- * 2 Tbs. peanut butter: size of a ping pong ball

- * 1 cup pasta: size of a tennis ball
- * Average bagel: size of a hockey puck.

The list below explains the size, shape, and/or look of one serving.

- * medium apple or orange: the size of a tennis ball
- * 1 cup chopped raw vegetables or fruit: baseball size
- * 1/4 cup dried fruit (raisins, apricots, mango): a small handful
- * lunch-box size container of unsweetened applesauce
- * cup of lettuce: four leaves
- * 1/2 cup cooked or canned legumes (beans and peas)

Lastly, it is very important for a child that is overweight or obese to follow a heart healthy diet. Obese/overweight children are more prone to chronic diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure and coronary disease. A low saturated fat diet of lean meats, low fat milk products, consumption of more whole grains and at least 5 fruits and vegetables (combined) a day with limited a intake of cookies, candy and pies can help your child lose weight and help prevent the onset of many chronic diseases. It is very hard in the fast food world we live in to resist hamburgers, hot dogs and French fries, but today even in fast food restaurants there are other choices such as different style salads and grilled chicken- they are the better choice for your kids. That choice is up to you.

Final Comments:

If any schools, organizations are interested in the New Food Guide Pyramid Musical Program I have included below an outline of the program and contact information.

The New Food Guide Pyramid Musical Program:

An Innovative Nutrition and Arts Education Program

The New Food Guide Pyramid Musical Program, based on MyPyramid, is a creative nutrition education/physical fitness program and winner of the New York State Certificate of Achievement Award (May 2004) for promoting all three of the Eat Well Play Hard (EWPH) core strategies. The New Food Guide Pyramid Musical Program has already been implemented in the New York City school system with fourth and fifth graders at PS 1, PS 163, PS 129, PS 123, PS 186, PS 142, PS 19 and PS 166. The program consists of a series of nutrition education classes in conjunction with rehearsals/physical exercise and a performance of an original nutrition/entertainment musical, The New Food Guide Pyramid Musical, performed by professional Broadway actors and the school children themselves to the assemblies of 1st to 5th graders.

The program emphasizes not only healthful eating habits, but also physical activity as an important component of a healthy lifestyle. This education initiative has as its purpose the prevention of childhood obesity and reduction of the long-term risks for chronic disease. Our program can include in addition, an evaluation administered during the program and another, six months later, to determine what knowledge was retained and put to practical use by the children.

The creator/director of the nutrition entertainment musical is Helen Butleroff-Leahy. Helen is a former Broadway dancer, Rockette, and director/creator and choreographer of over 50 Broadway, Off-Broadway, regional and summer stock theaters. Helen is also an RD (registered dietitian) and CDN (certified dietitian/nutritionist) who completed her dietetic internship at the NY Presbyterian hospitals of Cornell/Columbia.

For more information on The New Food Guide Pyramid Musical Program, please contact:

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