



Reimagining Nutrition Education for healthy bodies & minds

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Learning Objectives

- Identify **key considerations** for teaching skills-based nutrition education
- Review competencies for teaching **culturally relevant nutrition education** that honors diverse student identities
- Explore ideas that can help students fuel their bodies and minds **without judgment or the influence of diet culture**

Why Do We Eat?

PHYSICAL

To nourish our bodies
and give us energy

MENTAL

To help attention,
focus, and learning

EMOTIONAL

It makes us feel good
and can spark
emotions or nostalgia



SOCIAL

To connect with
others human beings

CULTURAL

To honor heritage
and cultural traditions

FAMILY

To strength
relationships and
family traditions

What challenges are students facing
related to nutrition & eating?

Here are some...

01

Equitable access to
nutritious food

03

Nutrition
misinformation and
disinformation

02

Access to food
representative of
culture and traditions

04

Body image: body
size, weight, shape,
or appearance

“Young people are **inundated with advertisements, influencer videos and social media images** encouraging them to pursue a particular way of eating and a narrow appearance ideal.

Although it's tempting to blame TikTok, **we must take a closer look at the way these harmful messages are being reinforced by parents, guardians and teachers.”**

Oona Hanson and Charlotte Markey, PhD

The Harms of Diet Talk

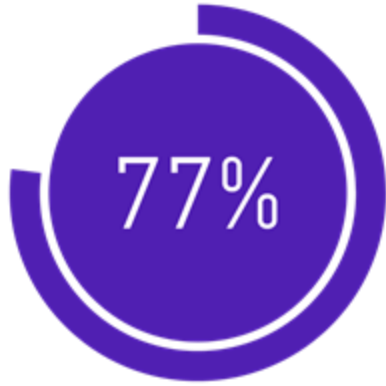
- Children are supposed to be gaining weight. They are growing and **weight gain is a sign of development and health.**
- Puberty is a time of significant weight gain and often a time children begin to internalize negative, diet messages.
 - Children gain on average 40 pounds in the 4 years around puberty.
 - Girls' body fat percentage increases by 120% during puberty.
 - **2 in 3** 13-year-old girls are fearful of gaining weight.
- Children are fearful of gaining weight when they need to be gaining weight.

The Harms of Diet Talk

- **Dieting is a risk factor for developing an eating disorder.**
 - Diets give the message that certain bodies are acceptable and others are not.
 - Children interpret these messages differently than adults. They may be confused by an adult talking about their own diet, wondering if they should be doing what their trusted adult is doing.
- **A focus on weight affects children's self esteem.** Children are born with the ability to regulate their intake and diets interfere with this innate ability.

Neumark-Sztainer D, Wall M, Eisenberg ME, Story M, Hannan PJ. Overweight status and weight control behaviors in adolescents: longitudinal and secular trends from 1999 to 2004. *Prev Med.* 2006 Jul;43(1):52-9. Epub 2006 May 11.

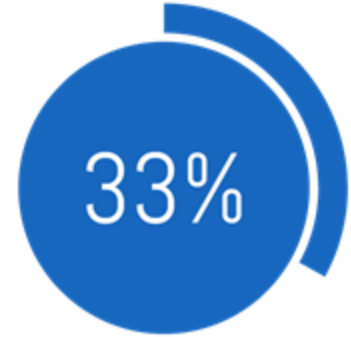
Davison KK, Birch LL. Weight status, parent reaction, and self-concept in five-year-old girls. *Pediatrics.* 2001;107:46-53.



of adolescents
experience **body
image distress**
(Milton, 2021).



of 5-year-old girls
**restrain their food
intake**
(Damiano et al., 2015)



of third grade girls
report that they
are **afraid of
becoming fat**
(Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2006)

PAUSE
& REFLECT



What can educators do to change
narratives around food and body
image?

Practices to Leave Behind

- Demonizing foods
- Placing moral value on food
- Using the language of addiction
- “Diet Talk”

Language matters when
talking about food with
students

“Why do you have all that junk in your lunch?”

“I’m not going to eat that. I’m being good today.”

“You’re lucky you can get a cookie. I can’t eat that kind of food.”

“I’m counting my steps so I can be ready for my cruise.”

“I need to lose weight.”

“I’m going to be bad and eat the birthday cake.”

"Sugar is bad."

Reimagining Nutrition Education

- Focus on the **JOY** of eating
- Build **knowledge and skills** that are age appropriate
- **Reduce weight stigma and body shaming**
- Highlight the role of food in not only **physical health**, but also **mental and social emotional** well-being
- **Use culturally relevant** lessons and activities that celebrate students' identity

Cultural identities are representative of *ethnicity, religious background, home culture and experiences, primary language and home dialects of English, family composition, and gender expression, among other student identities.*

Viewing these identities as **resources, valuable in their own right, and useful for deep learning** is crucial in ensuring access and equity for diverse learners.

[CA Health Education Framework](#)

Culturally and Linguistically Relevant/Responsive Teaching

Creating a **safe, supportive, and inclusive** learning environment includes:

- An asset based lens towards **cultural and linguistic diversity**
- **Multiple diverse** viewpoints and backgrounds
- Inclusive language when **speaking**, designing **instructional materials**, and developing **examples**, including visuals



Building a safe and
inclusive environment
through Culturally
Responsive Teaching

Figure 1 | Eight Competencies for Culturally Responsive Teaching




Key Considerations

- Reflect on your **cultural lens**
- Recognize your personal **biases** and those in the system
- Bring **real world issues** into the classroom
- **Model high expectations** for all students and promote respect
- **Collaborate** with families and the community



What is our nutrition education's
intended outcome for students?



Help students create a healthy
relationship with food

Building Knowledge and Skills

**Focus on
Nutrient Dense
Foods**

Essential
Concepts



**Honor Your
Hunger**

Decision Making
Communication



**Eat Enough &
Eat Regularly**

Practicing Health
Enhancing
Behaviors



Enjoy Your Food

Healthy
Relationships



Key Points

- Keep comments about weight, weight loss or dieting out of the earshot of children and adolescents
- Remind them that they are **still growing** and that they need to eat enough to support their activity and growth
- Talk about **what bodies do**, rather than what they look like
- Respect and celebrate **different food cultures** and be cognizant of food/ nutrition insecurity and varying access to food
- Promote **school meals!**

What shifts might educators make in their
nutrition lessons?

Elementary Nutrition Education

- Create **pressure free environments** to get familiar with different foods
- **Food is Fun**
 - **Art** with food
 - Focus on the **five senses**
 - Cooking, gardening, and composting
- Introduce food groups and eating a variety of foods to get all the nutrients you need

Activity Ideas

- Harvest of the Month: [OCDE/](#) [Oakland/](#) [SFUSD/](#) [UCSD/](#) [Montebello USD](#)
- [Nutrition Education Activities for P.E. \(Grades 1-6\)](#)



Middle & High School Nutrition Education

- Build a **healthy relationship** with food
- Stay positive
- Focus on what to **INCLUDE** in your diet, instead of what to **EXCLUDE**
- Practice **eating enough** and **eating regularly**
- Learn how to create meals with a **variety** of foods
- Allow students to personalize their learning and their goals

Activity Ideas

- [Master Chef Challenge](#): Creating nutrient dense meals activity
- Cooking in the classroom (if possible)



PAUSE
& REFLECT



What opportunities are there for relevant
nutrition education?

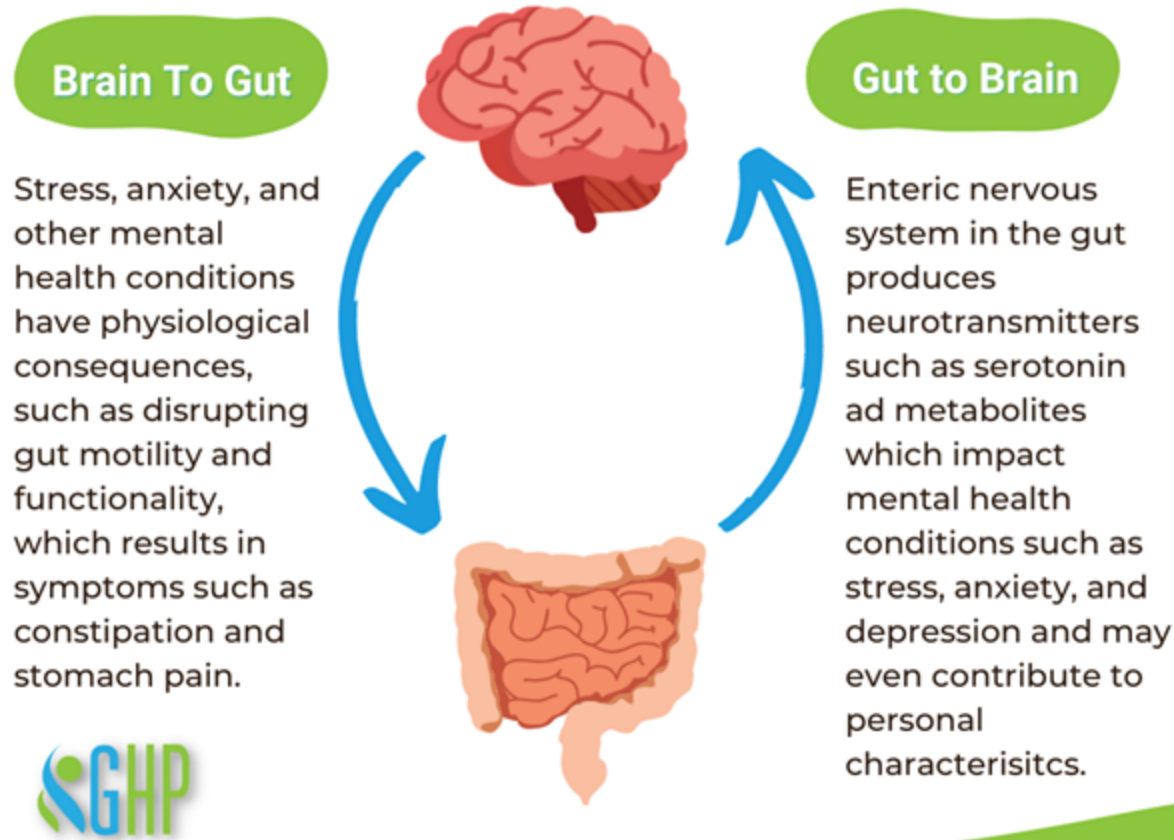
Brain Function and Mood

The brain requires a constant supply of nutrients to function optimally. **Nutrient-dense foods** rich in vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants nourish the brain and protect it from oxidative stress.

Diets high in refined sugars and ultra-processed foods can impair brain function and worsen symptoms of mood disorders like depression.

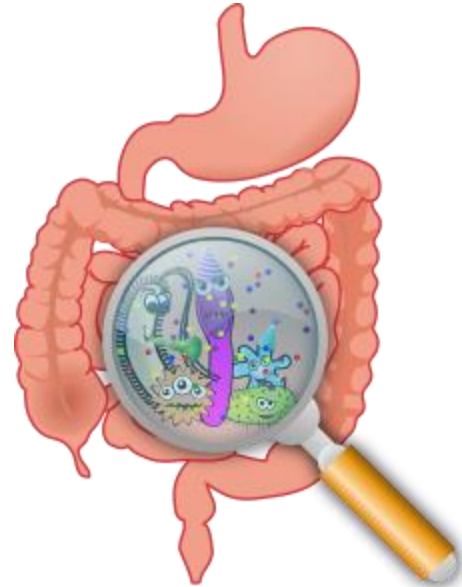


Gut-Brain Axis (GBA)



5 Keys to Gut Health

1. Food: prebiotic fibers, probiotics & fermentation, nutrient density, etc.
2. Sleep
3. Movement
4. Stress Management
5. Getting help for anxiety and depression



Inflammation and Mental Health

Diets high in ultra-processed foods can promote inflammation, which is linked to mental health issues.

Conversely, anti-inflammatory foods like fruits, vegetables, and fatty fish can help reduce inflammation and support mental well-being.



Nutrition Psychiatry

This emerging field studies how diet affects mental health. Research suggests that dietary patterns can influence the risk of developing mental health conditions like depression and ADHD.

For example, a Mediterranean diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and healthy fats is associated with better mental health outcomes.



Resources to explore & integrate



- Harvard Health- [Nutritional Psychiatry and the Microbiome](#)
- American Society of Nutrition (ASN) & American Psychiatric Association (APA) Partnership
 - [How to Boost Mental Health Through Better Nutrition](#)

Nutrition and Stress Management

Stress Busters: Seven Ways to Manage Stress (ACES Aware)

- Supportive Relationships
- Quality Sleep
- **Balanced Nutrition**
- Physical Activity
- Mindfulness Practices
- Experiencing Nature
- Mental Healthcare





Intuitive eating



Reject diet mentality



Honour your hunger



Make peace with food



Challenge the 'food police'



Discover the satisfaction factor



Feel your fullness



Cope with emotions with kindness



Respect your body



Exercise and feel the difference



Honour your health with gentle nutrition

Link your nutrition education to the district Wellness Policy to engage youth and allow for youth leadership opportunities!

Check out [this infographic](#) and [other resources](#) to learn more.

USDA Food and Nutrition Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Local School Wellness Policy Refresh!

Does your district's Local School Wellness Policy need an update?
Now is a great time to bring your school community together to create strong school environments that support students' growth, learning, and well-being.

The infographic features a central title "What's in a Local School Wellness Policy?" in large, bold, teal letters. Surrounding this title are several overlapping circles and shapes, each containing a policy component. The components are: "School Meals" (purple text in a teal circle), "Incentives/Prizes" (purple text in a yellow circle), "Nutrition Education" (red text in a yellow circle), "Marketing" (purple text in a yellow circle), "Physical Activity" (red text in a yellow circle), "Fundraisers" (purple text in a teal circle), "Snacks" (red text in a teal circle), and "Classroom Celebrations" (purple text in a teal circle). At the bottom left, there is a red rectangular box containing a row of five small blue icons representing people.

What's in a Local School Wellness Policy?

- School Meals
- Incentives/Prizes
- Nutrition Education
- Marketing
- Physical Activity
- Fundraisers
- Snacks
- Classroom Celebrations

Resources

- [Let's Make Our Classrooms and Schools Free of Diet Talk](#) (*Sunny Side Up Nutrition*)
- [Parents Need to Know: Misguided Nutrition Assignments Put Kids at Risk](#) (Oona Hanson and Charlotte Markey, Sept 2022, *US News & World Report*)
- [Weight shaming is literally sickening Stigma against size harms people's health — both mentally and physically](#) (Bethany Brookshire, Sept 2021, *Science News Explores*)
- [Nutrition Education for Kids](#) (Nicole Cruz, RND)
- [Healthy eating: what it REALLY looks like and how to talk to your kids about it](#) (Molly Forbes, Nov 2021, *Good To Know*)
- [It's a Big Fat Deal How Schools Teach Contempt for Fat People — and What We Can Do About It](#) (Katy Alexander, 2023, *Rethinking Schools*)
- [KIDS DON'T NEED TO DIET. EVER.](#) (Sept 2019, Health4U Program, Michigan State University)
- [Wellness culture gone wrong has come for kids](#) (Rina Raphael, May 2022, *Los Angeles Times*)
- [#DitchingDietCultureAtSchool](#) Digital Resource Library (2023, Caitlin O'Connor)
- [Trauma-Informed Nutrition: Resources for Families and Schools](#) (Kristi Mollner, MS, RDN, CCTS-I)

How will you build student **curiosity** rather
than **judgement**?



Thank You!