

LESSON 4



Balancing Act

Background

A balanced diet is important because different foods contain different combinations of nutrients. No single food can supply all the nutrients needed to maintain good health. For example, oranges provide vitamin C but not vitamin B₁₂, whereas cheese provides vitamin B₁₂ but not vitamin C. Foods in one food group cannot replace those in another. Similarly, not all foods in the same group contain the same nutrients. Oranges, for instance, do not contain much vitamin A, but cantaloupe is a good source of this vitamin. Choosing foods from all the food groups and choosing a variety of foods within each food group every day will make your diet interesting as well as balanced.

Nutrition surveys have found that American children are eating too many foods that are high in added sugar, salt, and saturated fat and not enough fruits, vegetables, and other nutrient-rich foods. Foods from all of the food groups are important. To make the best choices within each food group, remember the Kid's Healthy Eating Plate and these guidelines from the Principles of Healthy Living (see lesson 1):

- Choose colorful fruits and vegetables instead of junk food.
- Choose whole-grain foods and limit foods with added sugar.
- Make the switch from sugary drinks to water.
- Choose foods with healthy fat, limit foods high in saturated fat, and avoid foods with trans fat.

The Get 3 At School and 5+ A Day promotion, which encourages students to eat more fruits and vegetables, can be used as an extension to this lesson. See lesson 30 in part III, Promotions for the Classroom, for details.

Estimated Teaching Time and Related Subject Areas

Estimated teaching time: 80 minutes

Related subject areas: science, math

Objectives

- Learn the importance of a balanced diet and be able to assess and create a healthy and balanced menu.
- Be able to examine menus and identify and link sources of nutrients with specific foods.

Materials

- Handout 4.1, Food, Nutrients, and You
- Worksheet 4.1, Runner's Balanced Diet
- Worksheet 4.2, Now You Create a Balanced Meal!
- Worksheet 4.1 Solutions
- Worksheet 4.2 Solutions
- Overhead 4.1, Principles of Healthy Living
- Overhead 4.2, Kid's Healthy Eating Plate
- Overhead 4.3, Maria's Menu—Food Choices
- Overhead 4.3 Solutions

Procedure

1. Ask students to discuss the meaning of the word *balance*. Following are possible student responses:
 - Balance represents equality, fairness.
 - Balance means to remain upright, avoid falling.
 - Balance means to be stable, steady.
 - Balance means that one side equals the other side. There is not too much or too little on either side.
2. Ask the students how the definition of *balance* relates to the term *balanced diet*. The key idea is that having a balanced diet means eating a variety of healthy foods from each food group. Following are possible student responses:
 - People need to eat different kinds of foods for the body to obtain an assortment of vitamins, minerals, carbohydrate, protein, and fat, as well as drink water.
 - If you eat one food all the time, you won't get enough of the nutrients provided by other food choices, and so you won't be balanced.
3. Project Overhead 4.1, Principles of Healthy Living, and review the key messages, especially the principles that relate to fruits and vegetables, whole grains, foods with healthy fat, and water. Next, project Overhead 4.2, Kid's Healthy Eating Plate, and review the importance of choosing the best-choice foods from all the food groups, as well as choosing a variety of foods from each food group every day. Next, project Overhead 4.3, Maria's Menu—Food Choices, and have the students examine Maria's menu to see whether it meets the healthy living guidelines. Together, the students complete the table to assess Maria's diet using these considerations:
 - Are her grain choices whole grains?
 - Did she eat at least five servings of colorful fruits and vegetables?
 - Did she choose foods with healthy fat, such as olive oil, peanut butter, and fish?
 - Did she limit her intake of sugary drinks and foods with added sugar?

Ask the students, "Is Maria's diet balanced or unbalanced?" The answer is that her diet is somewhat balanced. She selected foods from each food group, but she could make some healthier choices and have a more varied menu. For example, Maria could do the following:

- **Fruits:** Rather than choose a banana at both breakfast and lunch, she could choose sliced strawberries in place of a banana at one of the meals. Also, she could add grapes or apple slices at dinner to get another healthy fruit into her diet.
- **Vegetables:** French fries (potatoes) are not healthy vegetables, plus Maria had them for both lunch and dinner. She needs to eat more colorful healthy vegetables (especially ones that are dark green and deep orange); she could choose a baked sweet potato, steamed broccoli, or cauliflower sautéed in olive oil.
- **Grains:** She gets no whole grains. She needs to choose 100% whole-wheat breads and buns as well as grains that have little or no added sugar. She could choose steel-cut oatmeal or unsweetened shredded wheat rather than Frosted Flakes.
- **Sugary drinks:** Rather than drink Kool-Aid and chocolate milk, the best choice for Maria would be water. Other choices can include 100% fruit juice (no more than 4-6 oz, or 120-170 ml, per day) or unflavored milk. To make it easier to stay within the fruit juice limit, Maria could dilute a small amount of 100% fruit juice (2 oz, or 60 ml) with sparkling water.
- **Unhealthy fat:** Bacon and cheeseburgers are high in saturated fat, so it would be better for Maria to choose a dinner entrée that is lower in saturated fat, such

as baked chicken. Dairy products such as unflavored milk and small amounts of cheese can be great sources of protein, but they also contain saturated fat. Some restaurants still serve french fries that contain trans fat, which should be avoided.

4. Review the meaning of the concept of eating balanced meals. Discuss the following key points:
 - A balanced diet gives your body what it needs to be healthy and to grow strong. The key to a balanced diet is choosing a variety of best-choice foods from each food group.
 - Each food group provides a unique mix of nutrients the body needs, so it is important to eat healthy foods from each group every day. We do not need the same amount of food from each group. The key to a balanced diet is to recognize that whole grains, vegetables, fruits, and plant-based healthy protein are needed in greater proportion than the animal-based foods in the protein and dairy groups. (To reinforce this point and the next point, display Overhead 4.2, Kid's Healthy Eating Plate.)
 - A balanced, healthy diet also contains a variety of foods from each food group. Just as each food group offers a different mix of nutrients, so too do individual foods within a food group. By choosing many types of foods within a group, you are helping make sure that your body gets the nutrients it needs to thrive. Plus, eating a variety of foods also keeps your meals interesting and full of flavor.
 - Sweets (including soda and other sugary drinks) and foods that are high in unhealthy fat are not a necessary part of a balanced, healthy diet. In fact, they are often the main foods that make a diet unbalanced and unhealthy, because they can take the place of more nutritious choices. These foods should be eaten rarely, if ever, to make sure that your diet stays balanced and healthy.
5. Distribute Handout 4.1, Food, Nutrients, and You, and briefly discuss the six types of nutrients, their functions, and their food sources.
6. Have students form pairs or small groups. Distribute Worksheet 4.1, and read "A Runner's Story" aloud.
7. After reading the story, have the students discuss in their pairs or small groups how specific foods and their related nutrients would help the runner successfully train and complete the race. Have them fill in the blanks on the chart, including what the runner might have eaten to get each nutrient. Discuss the group's ideas and list their food choices on the board, along with the nutrients and benefits provided. (Refer to Worksheet 4.1 Solutions for ideas.)
8. Display the Principles of Healthy Living and Kid's Healthy Eating Plate once again, and relate student answers back to this guide. Do the foods they picked for the Runner's Balanced Diet worksheet come from all food groups? Do their food selections include the best choices from each food group, following the Kid's Healthy Eating Plate and the Principles of Healthy Living (specifically, to eat whole grains, colorful fruits and vegetables, and foods with healthy fat)?
9. Distribute Worksheet 4.2, Now You Create a Balanced Meal! Have students work individually, in their pairs, or in small groups to create a balanced menu on their own Healthy Eating Plate. A solutions worksheet is provided to give examples of nutrients that are part of a balanced meal.
10. When the students, student pairs, or small groups have finished, ask them to share their balanced meals with the class. Post each group's plate on a bulletin board for everyone to view.
11. Encourage the students to ensure that their meals are as balanced as possible each day so they will get all the nutrients they need to grow and be healthy.

