LESSON 21

Snack Decisions

Background

There are no bad foods that should never be eaten. But most Americans eat too many foods that are high in saturated and trans fat, salt, and added sugar, and most Americans do not eat enough fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Snack foods tend to have a lot of added salt, sugar, saturated fat, and even trans fat, yet they have few vitamins or minerals. The purpose of this lesson is to help students make better snack choices by teaching them to recognize foods that contain unhealthy fat—namely, saturated fat and trans fat. Remember that most saturated fat comes from animal sources (including beef, chicken, pork, and dairy products). The few exceptions are coconut oil and palm oil, which are also rich in saturated fat. Commercial baked or fried foods are sometimes prepared with partially hydrogenated vegetable oils, so they also are sources of trans fat. Reading food labels and ingredients lists is a good way to compare the fat and nutrient contents of snack foods.

The column on the nutrition facts label headed % Daily Value (% DV) can quickly tell you whether a food is high or low in the nutrients listed. If the % DV for a nutrient is 5 or less, the food is considered low in that nutrient. If the % DV is 20 or more, the food is high in that nutrient.

Whether or not a food fits into your diet depends on what other foods you eat. For most people, the daily goal is to choose foods that add up to 100% of the DV for total dietary fiber, vitamins, and minerals (especially vitamins A and C, calcium, and iron). For saturated fat and sodium, the goal is to choose foods that add up to less than 100% of the DV. (To calculate the % DV for saturated fat, see lesson 18.) The % DV is based on a diet of 2,000 calories per day.

There is no % DV for trans fat because it is unclear whether there is any safe level of intake. But food labels list the number of grams of trans fat per serving. It is best to avoid foods that contain trans fat. Keep in mind that products made with partially hydrogenated oils can still claim "0 grams trans fat" if the product contains less than 0.5 grams of trans fat per serving. These small amounts of trans fat can add up over the day. So make sure to watch out for the words *partially hydrogenated vegetable oil; partially hydrogenated soybean, cottonseed,* or other oils; or *shortening* in the ingredients list. Choose an alternative product that does not contain partially hydrogenated oil, especially if it is a product you consume regularly.*

Added sugar comes in many forms—sugar (or sucrose), high-fructose corn syrup, dextrose, and honey are all examples of added sugar (see Worksheet 7.2 for a list of the names for sugar). The ingredients list on the food package can be used to identify added sugars; because ingredients are listed in descending order of quantity (by weight), we can get an idea of the quantity of added sugars from their relative position on the ingredients list.** A good rule of thumb is to avoid snacks and other foods that list sugar (in some form) as one of the first four ingredients, and avoid foods that list multiple sources of sugar on the ingredients label.

**At the time of publication, the FDA banned the use of partially hydrogenated oils in food products, giving manufacturers three years to comply with the decision. This edition's messaging on avoiding trans fat from partially hydrogenated oils remains important guidance during the transitional period.*

***At the time of publication, the FDA proposed the addition of "added sugars" to the Nutrition Facts label with the recommendation that daily intake of calories from added sugars not exceed 10% of total calories (10% DV). If finalized, this change will be reflected in the web resource materials.*

Estimated Teaching Time and Related Subject Area

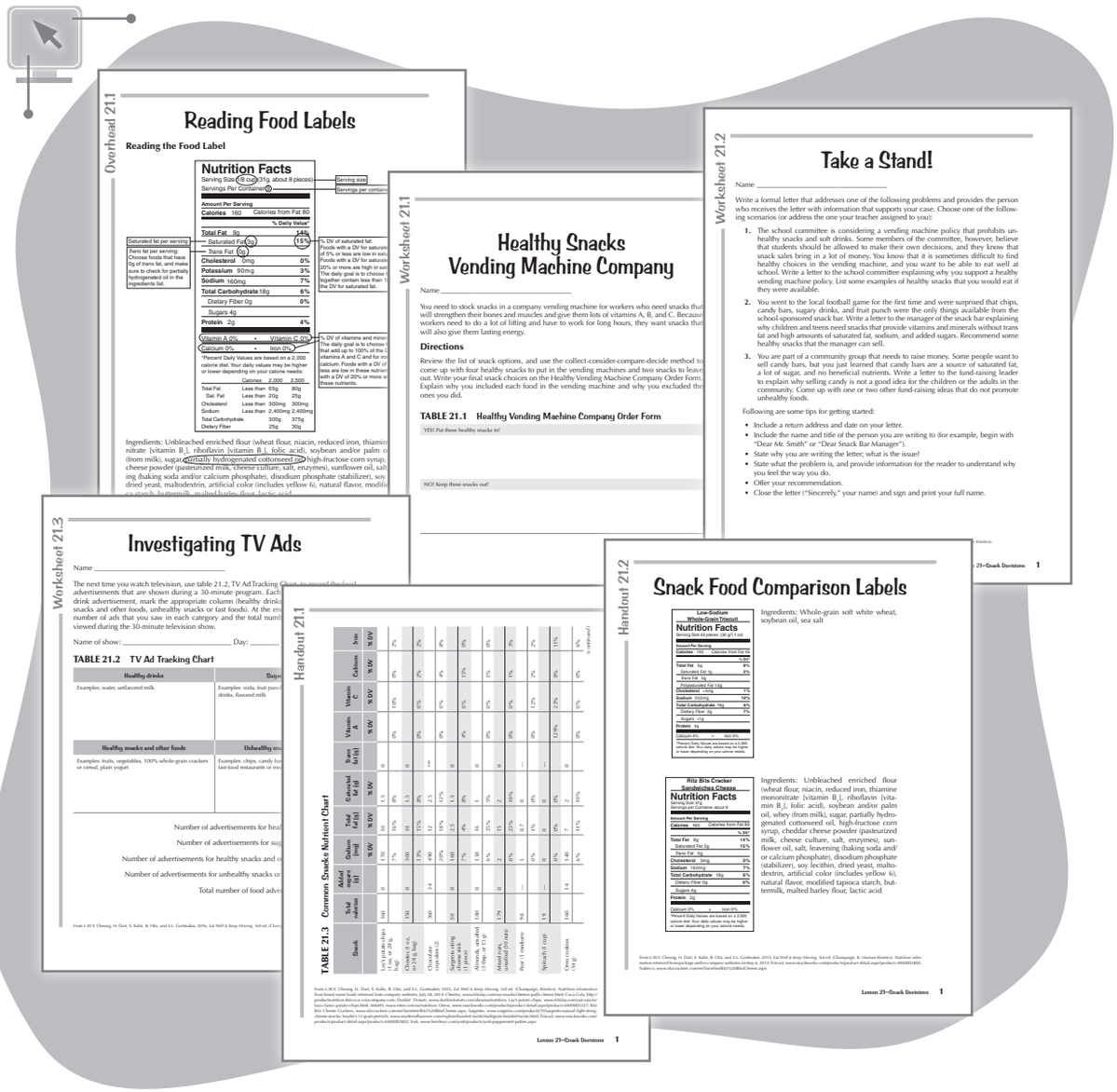
Estimated teaching time: 1 hour, 10 minutes
Related subject area: language arts

Objectives

- Examine a list of food selections to identify those with high nutritional value.
- Apply the collect-consider-compare-decide model when choosing snack foods.
- Write a formal letter in support of healthy snacks.

Materials

- Decision-making steps written on a large poster board:
  - Collect information.
  - Consider nutrients.
  - Compare to other choices.
  - Decide what to choose.
- Overhead 21.1, Reading Food Labels
- Worksheet 21.1, Healthy Snacks Vending Machine Company
- Worksheet 21.2, Take a Stand!
- Worksheet 21.3, Investigating TV Ads (for extension activity)
- Handout 21.1, Common Snacks Nutrient Chart
- Handout 21.2, Snack Food Comparison Labels (for extension activity)
- Sample snack food labels (have a variety available and ask students to bring some from home)



Procedure

Part I

1. Tell the students that sometimes during work or school hours, people take a break. This break may be called a snack break, rest break, or time-out.
2. Have the students say what they think happens during a break from work or play. List the students' suggestions on the board.
3. Have the students tell why a pause, or break, is a healthy practice. Emphasize that the body's needs—such as for rest and food—may be addressed during breaks.
4. Have students name some snacks they might enjoy during a work or play break. Write down their choices on the board.

Part II

1. Explain to the students that they will be in charge of choosing snacks for the snack machines of the Healthy Snacks Vending Machine Company. Tell them: "The workers need snacks that will strengthen their bones and muscles and give them lots of vitamins A, B, and C. Because the workers do a lot of lifting and have to work for long hours, they want snacks that will also give them energy."
2. Display the decision-making steps (on poster board).
3. Show Overhead 21.1, Reading Food Labels. Discuss % DV with students, and tell them that it is a good tool for choosing healthy snacks. The % DVs that appear on food labels let people find out whether a food is high or low in certain nutrient. Regarding saturated fat, if the % DV is 5 or less, then the food is considered low in saturated fat. The more foods chosen that have a % DV of 5 or less for saturated fat, the easier it is to eat a heart-healthy diet. The overall daily goal (for all the foods eaten in one day) is to select foods that add up to less than 100% of the DV for saturated fat. The % DV also lets people find out whether a food is high or low in other nutrients, such as vitamins A and C, calcium, and iron. If the % DV for any of these nutrients is 5 or less, the food is considered low in that nutrient. If the % DV is 20 or higher, the food is considered high in that nutrient. The overall daily goal (for all the foods eaten in one day) is to select foods that together reach 100% of the DV for these beneficial nutrients. Remind students that in addition to % DV on food labels, products also list the ingredients they contain. Scanning this list can help us spot the many types of added sugar as well as unhealthy partially hydrogenated oils.
4. Distribute Handout 21.1, Common Snacks Nutrient Chart. Select one of the snacks from the list, and lead the students in applying the following step-by-step process to determine whether the snack is a healthy choice:

   Collect information: Study the label or read the nutrient chart (Handout 21.1).

   Consider nutrients: Think about the nutrient content. Healthy snacks need to (1) be low in saturated fat, have 0 grams of trans fat, and contain no partially hydrogenated oils in the ingredients list; (2) be good sources of vitamins and minerals; (3) be moderate to low in added sugar, and (4) be moderate to low in salt (foods with a % DV of 5 or less are considered low in sodium).

   Compare other choices: What other choices do I have? Is there a better selection?

   Decide what to choose: What is best for the body? Is this selection low in saturated fat, and does it have 0 grams of trans fat and no partially hydrogenated oils in the ingredients list? Does it have added sugars? Does it have a high amount of sodium? Does it contain whole grains? Is it a fruit or vegetable?

5. Distribute Worksheet 21.1, Healthy Snacks Vending Machine Company, and refer students to Handout 21.1, Common Snacks Nutrient Chart, or to sample labels of snack foods (or both). Have the students work in pairs or small groups to examine selections from the list of snacks. Ask them to apply the decision-making process to come up with several healthy snacks for the vending machine, along with some snacks that should stay out. Students should be able to explain how they decided that certain snacks are healthy and others are not.
6. After the pairs or groups have decided which snacks will be in their vending machines, have them share some of their findings with the rest of the class, referring to the steps of the decision-making model to explain their choices. For example, students might say: "One of the snacks we analyzed was an orange. We consider this a good choice because we want something that is loaded with nutrients. We found that an orange has a lot vitamin C, about 100% of the DV. An orange can help workers meet the Principles of Healthy Living goal to choose fruits and vegetables instead of junk food, and it is a natural source of sugar that provides a quick but healthy boost of energy." Students might also say: "We examined M&M candies as a snack. M&M's have a lot of added sugar, so they do provide energy, but the energy probably won't last long. Also, they have no vitamins or minerals, so they won't provide any healthy nutrients. We decided that M&M's wouldn't be a healthy choice."

Part III

Ask students to write a formal letter using one of the scenarios in Worksheet 21.2—or you may assign your own scenarios.

1. The school committee is considering a snack policy that prohibits the sale of unhealthy snacks and soft drinks. Some members of the committee, however, believe that students should be allowed to make their own decisions, and they know that snack sales bring in a lot of money. You know that it is sometimes difficult to find healthy choices in the lunchroom or vending machine, and you want to be able to eat well at school. Write a letter to the school committee explaining why you support a healthy vending machine policy. List some examples of healthy foods that you would eat if they were available.
2. You went to the local football game for the first time and were surprised that chips, candy bars, sugary drinks, and fruit punch were the only things available from the school-sponsored snack bar. Write a letter to the manager of the snack bar explaining why children and teenagers need snacks that provide vitamins and minerals without trans fat and high amounts of saturated fat, sodium, and added sugars. Recommend some healthy snacks that the manager can sell.
3. You are part of a community group that needs to raise money. Some people want to sell candy bars, but you just learned that candy bars are a source of saturated fat, contain a lot of sugar, and have no beneficial nutrients. Write a letter to the fund-raising leader to explain why selling candy is not a good idea for the children or the adults in the community. Come up with one or two other fund-raising ideas that do not promote unhealthy foods.

Extension Activities

1. Distribute Worksheet 21.3, Investigating TV Ads, and have students record the number of snacks advertised on television during a 30-minute program.
   a. Discuss the types of unhealthy snacks advertised. Were any healthy snacks advertised? For additional ideas on discussing advertisements with students, refer to lesson 19, Teacher Resource 19.1, Evaluating Media Advertising.

b. Group the students and have them create an advertisement for one of the healthy snack choices they selected while completing Worksheet 21.1. The advertisement may be a poster (for a magazine or billboard), skit, rap, commercial, or song (for radio or television), or an online promotion (for websites or social media).

c. As a class, write a letter to the cafeteria manager requesting permission to display the healthy snack posters and online promotions in the cafeteria. For groups who created a television commercial, provide some time for them to put on their skits for the class. Groups that created a radio ad may also write a letter to the principal requesting permission to deliver their radio message on the school's public announcement system.

2. Have students create a nutrition crossword puzzle that reinforces the important aspects of choosing healthy snacks. The puzzle may also contain nutrition and physical activity information learned in previous lessons.

3. Distribute Handout 21.2, Snack Food Comparison Labels, or present two actual food labels (one food should be high in saturated or trans fat and one should be low in saturated fat and contain 0 grams of trans fat and no partially hydrogenated oils in the ingredients list). Have the students write a paragraph explaining why one is a better choice than the other for a person trying to eat a healthy diet.