

HEALTH, WHAT IS HEALTH?

Conceptions of health for children

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Part 1: Practical Guidance and Didactical Approach

Background and keywords:

There is little doubt about the value of health. However, there is much controversy about the actual meaning of this value. The individual conception of health is very important because it will affect daily practices and their consideration as either beneficial or not for ourselves and for others. Therefore, healthy practices will differ according to the individual conception of health.

In a very basic categorisation of health-related conceptions, we can distinguish two types, i.e. *negative* and *positive* conceptions.

Keywords: Health, healthy practices, health conceptions.

Similar topics:

See key words

Materials:

- Computers with internet access. Alternatively, magazines and supermarket leaflets can substitute;
- A watch;
- Magazines and supermarket leaflets.

Duration:

- 3 one-hour class sessions.
- One hour of practice of physical activity.

Number of participants:

- Five or more.
- The ideal size for a group would be 20 to 25 boys and girls divided in groups of 5.

Age:

10 to 11 year old boys and girls (11 y.o. for section B)

Aims:

- To understand the meaning of health;
- To learn about healthy practices;
- To be able to hold class discussions about health.

(Short) Explanation:

These are examples of activities addressed to provide information and suggest practices related to diet and exercise in order to promote healthy life styles among students.

Guidance for the game or exercise:

We have included two sections with activities:

The first activity in section A is designed to teach students what a healthy diet should look like and to help them prepare healthy food by themselves. Students have to look up the internet or the library for information about the Food Pyramid and answer some questions. They are encouraged to reflect on the importance of food and diet for their health. We also include an activity to teach students how to keep their heart rate within the aerobic zone.

In section B, we suggest activities and questions in order to reflect about the problematic meanings of health. Students are asked to draw a picture of a healthy and unhealthy person, compare them with their mates and describe similarities and differences. There is also a reading activity for discussion of eating disorders.

Section A: Activities to promote healthy habits

1. The Food Pyramid

Check the previous module for information on the Food Pyramid¹. You can also find out extra information in the library or in this website:
(http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/mpk_poster.pdf)

Answer the following questions:

- Which nutrients does each group provide you with? Why are they important for your health?
- How many times a day do you eat products from each group? Do you match recommended servings?

Now you will get your hands on a sheet of paper to have a real food pyramid.

- Fold a piece a paper and draw on one side the Food Pyramid and on the other your *actual* Food Pyramid. Do they match? Which food group should you increase? And which one should you reduce?

Are you ready for a game? Play *Pyramid Go Fish*

Students play *Pyramid Go Fish* with food cards they make with supermarket leaflets cut outs. This activity will give students additional practice in sorting foods into groups.

Getting Started:

- Duplicate food illustrations from supermarket leaflets and cut into cards.
- Put students into groups of four and distribute 30 cards to each group.
- Now play Pyramid Go Fish. The dealer deals out four cards to each student, and places the rest in the middle. The first student (let's call him Michael) asks the student sitting to his left, "Kayla, do you have a fruit?" If Kayla has a fruit she

¹ Food Pyramid is an outline of what to eat each day. Food is grouped in five nutritional categories with recommended servings a day: Group 1 includes bread, cereal, rice, and pasta (6 to 11 servings); Group 2 refer to vegetables (3 to 5 servings); fruits belong to group 3 (2 to 4 servings); group 4 includes yoghurt, milk, cheese (2 to 4 servings); and group 5 which includes meat, poultry, fish, dry beans, eggs, and nuts (2 to 3 servings). It is not a rigid prescription, but a general guide that let you choose a healthful diet that is right for you. The Pyramid calls for eating a variety of foods to get the nutrients you need and at the same time the right amount of calories to maintain or improve your weight.

says, "Yes, I do," and hands her card to Michael, who then places his pair of cards on the table. Michael is then able to ask the next student a question.

- If Kayla doesn't have a fruit, she replies, "No I don't have a fruit. Go fish," and Michael can take a card from the pile in the middle. It is then Kayla's turn to ask the student on her left for a card. The students continue to ask questions and find cards until all the pairs are found. The student with the most pairs wins.

Now you will get your hands on in the kitchen to have real food cooked for a party.

- Ask your relatives or look up for recipes made out of food belonging to the groups you need to increase. You can check these links to locate recipes for kids:

http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/nal_display/index.php?info_center=14&tax_level=2&tax_subject=230&topic_id=1189

http://www.wicworks.ca.gov/education/nutrition/kidsRecipes/cooking_w_index.htm

<http://www.kidsacookin.ksu.edu/Welcome.aspx>

In the following link you have recipes from the American Heart Association Kids' Cookbook:

<http://www.healthyfridge.org/kidsrec.html>

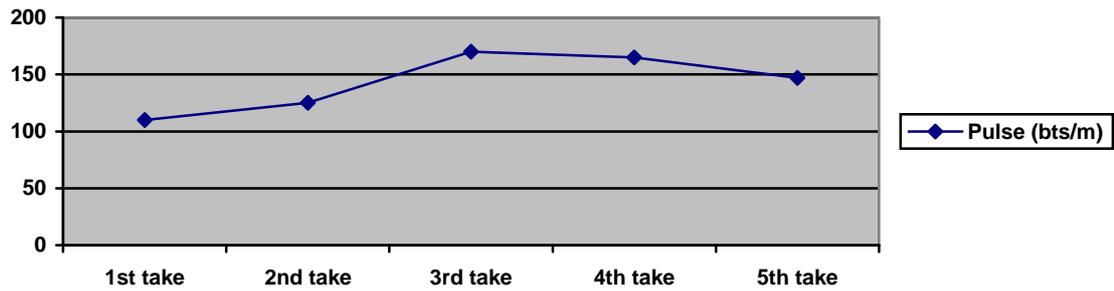
- Try to cook them (ask for help if you need it). Then organize a "Food Pyramid Party" and share the dishes you have cooked with your friends.

2. Aerobics can be fun –if we know how to do them!

We call aerobics to those exercises that increase the need of oxygen. An aerobic exercise is any repetitive activity that you do long enough and hard enough to challenge your heart rate, in order to provide oxygen to the muscles. In this practice we are going to learn how to control the intensity of our aerobics. There is a relation between the heart rate and the intensity of aerobics. The more intense the work, the more oxygen we need and the faster our heart must work to send it to our muscles. The *aerobic heart rate* helps us to adapt the intensity of the exercise to our actual fitness. The aerobic heart rate is considered to be between 80% (upper limit) and 60% (lower limit) of your maximum heart rate (220-your age). For example, if you are 16 your maximum heart rate would be 204 (220-16). Then the upper limit of your aerobic zone would be 163 beats per minute (80% of 204) and the lower limit 122 (60% of 204). In order to control intensity you can take your pulse during exercise and compare it with the upper and lower limits of the aerobic zone. If it is near or above the upper limit (for example 165 beats per minute), that means that you should reduce the intensity (e.g. run slower or even walk); and if it is near or below the lower limit (for example 120 beats per minute), that means that you should strengthen the intensity a little!

- For this practice you will need a pen, a piece of paper and a watch. First, calculate your aerobic heart rate and then go with a colleague for a run. You can choose the time, the speed and the kind of aerobic activity you want to do (e.g. jogging, dancing, skipping, skating, bike riding, ... there are plenty!). The challenge is not to do a lot, but to do it well! For that you must try to keep your heart rate between the upper and the lower limit of the aerobic heart rate throughout the practice.

- Take your pulse every 3 minutes (you can count beats in 15 seconds and then



multiply them by 4). After the run, make a graphic of the results similar to this: Did you keep your heart rate within the aerobic zone? If you did not, what should you do, increase or decrease the intensity of exercise?

Section B: Reflecting on the notion of health

- Draw a picture of a healthy person and another of an unhealthy person. Compare them with your mates´ and describe similarities and differences. Which one do you identify yourself with?
- Collect advertisements from journals and magazines that include references to health. What do they sell? Who are those products addressed to? Do they include rigorous information?
- Collect pictures from journals and magazines that, according to you, represent healthy bodies. Categorize them according to the sex (male, female), age (children/adolescent, young, old), race (white, black, Asian, others) and social class (low, middle, upper) represented and analyze the features. See the following as an example:

	Sex		Age			Race				Class		
	M	F	C	Y	O	W	B	A	O	L	M	U
	X	X		X		X						X

- Do the same with unhealthy bodies. What are your conclusions about the way that health and healthy bodies are represented?
- Stick all the ads and the pictures and make the "Poster of the Social Ideas of Health". What are the concepts and ideas that prevail?
- What do you think are the main health problems in your country? What should be done to solve them? Now look up the internet about the health problems in undeveloped countries. Are they similar or different to yours? What should be done to improve health around the world?
- Read and discuss this article²:

² From http://edstrong.blog-city.com/obesity_and_anorexia_a_culture_of_eating_extremes.htm

"We are what we eat - or indeed what we don't."

Last week two apparently contradictory but equally important health issues have been at the forefront of the news agenda, both underlining the importance of healthy and sensible eating. On the one hand the government had its bony knuckles rapped by an influential committee of MPs for its slowness to tackle the obesity epidemic in children, with efforts hampered by ministers' attempts to stay friendly with the powerful - not to mention rich - food industry. And at the same time, the debate about the use of stick-like models and body image was reignited in the run-up to London Fashion Week next month. As revealed by The Guardian, the British Fashion Council, which owns and runs the annual event, has stopped short of demanding that designers do not use extremely thin models bordering on the anorexic. Instead it has recommended that designers use "healthy-looking" models (whatever that means) and agreed to set up a taskforce to draw up a voluntary code of practice.

Experts in eating disorders expressed their disappointment that tougher measures had not been adopted, and the council was accused of kow-towing to the rich and influential (sounds familiar?) designers.

It seems staggering in this day and age that at one end of the scale we have the problem of girls not eating enough - in some cases, indeed, starving themselves to death in order to look attractive. At the other end an entire generation of youngsters who are eating so much that they may die before their parents. We live in an information-rich age where we have more facts and figures about nutrition and healthy eating than ever before. What a contrast to the experience of previous generations, like my grandmother - forced to eat bread and dripping when there was nothing else in the house.

But that in itself has brought its pressures - we are bombarded with TV advertising and marketing aimed specifically at children, with parents the victims of "pester power". It is not surprising that young girls aspire to be thin when stick-thin models dominate the pages of magazines and advertising hoardings. Depressingly, bad habits start early and British youngsters as young as five are revealed as the biggest consumers in Europe of unhealthy sweets and fizzy drinks, skipping up to a quarter of their daily breakfasts - arguably the most important meal of the day.

MPs on the Commons public accounts committee called for the appointment of an "obesity tsar" to galvanise a public health drive and say parents must be given clearer guidelines about encouraging their children to eat more healthily. The fact is that it is not fair to blame the government alone for our bad eating habits - whichever end of the spectrum they fall. It is down to parents and families to use their instincts and to educate their children about healthy eating in the home. The external pressures and influences are powerful, which is why setting up taskforces and appointing "tsars" will, at the end of the day, only have a limited impact"

- Which are the main ideas discussed in the article?
- Do you think that obesity and anorexia are the two sides of the same coin?
- What can "external pressures" do to cope with eating disorders and obesity?

Variations (Continuation):

In case there is no computer access, magazines and supermarket leaflets can be used for cutting outs in order to make a Food Pyramid. The same materials can be used to cut out body images.

Reflection:

Promoting health in school must combine information and activities to enhance healthy life-styles with a critical reflection on the meanings of health. After the activities in this module, you can ask your students the following questions:

- Ask your parents, relatives and friends whether they consider themselves to be healthy and what they do to achieve health. Write their answers and try to identify features of the positive and negative conceptions of health. Which ones prevail?
- Make a list of five practices that you consider healthy. Do you normally practice them? In case you do not, what would you need in order to do them?