More Information About EatFit
University of California, Davis

EatFit is a goal-setting curriculum designed to challenge middle school students to improve their eating and fitness choices. It is adaptable for after school programs, 4-H Youth Development, school classrooms and other youth programs.

Overview: The EatFit curriculum featuring nine nutrition and fitness lessons was developed to help students develop critical thinking skills in service of making better food and exercise choices. It is based on Bandura’s successful application of Social Cognitive Theory to change health behaviors. All activities are hands-on and interactive providing exciting experiences for adolescents. The lessons also support California common core state standards for middle school students and other learners.

This curriculum provides students feedback on their eating and physical activity in the form of printed personal analyses. Students have the freedom to select from a menu of eating and physical activity goals from which they may select one of each as their program goals. Using current nutrition and physical activity research, the following is the EatFit menu of guided goals.

Guided Eating Goals:
- Improved eating habits
- Increased calcium intake
- Increased fruit and vegetable intake
- Increased iron
- Decreased fat intake
- Decreased sugar intake

Guided Physical Activity Goals:
- Increased aerobic activity
- Improved lifestyle
- Increased strength
- Increased flexibility

Background information on Eating and Physical Activity patterns: The first representative survey of eating and exercise habits of California’s two million adolescents, ages 12 to 17, was conducted by CALTEENS in 1999. It confirms what most other research found - the prevalence of lifestyle risk factors that lead to acute and chronic disease is high. The statewide survey paints a bleak picture of health of California adolescents, a third of whom are at risk of being or are already overweight. The finding on fruit and vegetable consumption is alarming. Unfortunately, children eat fewer fruits and vegetables than adults.

While the CALTEENS findings are cause for concern, change is possible. The survey found that improvements in teens’ health behaviors were clearly linked to educational measures like having a nutrition class, knowing how to read a label or menu, acquiring skills in healthy cooking and working in a garden.

The 1999 CALTEENS report challenges us to help adolescents develop the personal skills needed for healthy eating and exercise. It further challenges adults and youth to assure that their home, community, and school environments support healthier life styles and minimize exposure to negative influences. It further encourages us to promote adolescent well-being with early interventions. EatFit is just such an intervention.

**Change is possible:** Research shows that children who know that 5 daily servings of fruits and vegetables is recommended are more likely to report eating a larger number of servings. Furthermore, nearly half the children surveyed prepared their own breakfasts and snacks, opening many opportunities for changing behaviors with nutrition education. EatFit encourages higher consumption of fruits and veggies as well as self-efficacy in breakfast preparation.

School-based nutrition education is particularly important because large numbers of children can be reached. The increase in one-parent families or families having two working parents, and the availability of convenience foods and fast-food restaurants inhibit parents’ monitoring of their children’s eating habits. Today’s children and adolescents frequently decide what to eat with little adult supervision. Teachers and food service personnel can contribute to nutrition education at school-based programs. They can also teach students how to resist peer pressures that discourage healthy eating. In fact, they can harness the power of peer pressure to reinforce healthy eating habits.

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