Tips for Teachers

Promoting Healthy Eating & Physical Activity in the Classroom

Allow Access to Drinking Water

- Allow students to visit the water fountain throughout the school day and to carry water bottles in class.
  - Send a note to parents that students will be allowed to bring water bottles to your class, though not mandatory. If bottles are filled at home, ask parents to use only plain water.
- Inform school maintenance staff if water fountains are not clean or are not functioning properly.

Access to drinking water throughout the day gives students a healthy alternative to sugar-sweetened beverages.[1] Staying hydrated may also improve student cognitive function.[2]

Use Student Rewards that Support Health

- Do not use food or beverages to reward student achievement or good behavior.
  - Avoid giving students candy or food coupons.
- Use nonfood items, activities and opportunities for physical activity to recognize students for their achievements or good behavior.
  - Offer stickers, books, extra time for recess, or walks with the principal or teacher.

Ideas for nonfood rewards

- Do not withhold food, beverages, or physical activity time to discipline for academic performance or poor classroom behavior.

Children are at risk of associating food with emotions and feelings of accomplishment when food is used in the classroom as a reward. This reinforces the practice of eating outside of meal or snack times and encourages students to eat treats even when they are not hungry. This practice may create lifetime habits of rewarding or comforting oneself with unhealthy eating.

[1] Sugar-sweetened beverages are liquids that are sweetened with various forms of sugars that add calories. These beverages include, but are not limited to, soda, fruitades and fruit drinks, and sports and energy drinks. Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010*. 7th Edition, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, December 2010.

[2] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Water Access in Schools web site. http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/npao/wateraccess.htm. Accessed November 21, 2013.

National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
Division of Population Health

Make Celebrations and Fundraisers Healthier

- Encourage parents to provide healthy foods and beverages for birthday and classroom parties if food is served.
  - Send a note to parents suggesting healthier options, such as fruits, vegetables, or whole grain snacks.
- Consider nonfood celebrations such as guest speakers, an extra recess period, or class games.
- Use healthy foods, physical activity events, or nonfood items for fundraising activities.
  - Consider selling items such as produce, wrapping paper, candles, or student artwork.
  - Organize events that engage students, families, and the community.
    - » Basketball or golf tournaments, bicycle rides, walk-a-thons, dance-a-thons, car washes, or auctions are healthy fundraising alternatives.

Create A Physically Active Classroom

- Incorporate movement into academic lessons or add short bursts of activity (5-20 minutes) to regularly planned break times.
  - Read a book aloud while students walk at a moderate pace around the room, and then ask students to identify the verbs or action words in the book by acting them out through physical activity.
  - Take students for a walk indoors or outdoors as part of a science lesson.
- Include content about fitness, movement skills and the importance of physical activity as part of math, science or writing lesson plans.
- Work with the physical education teacher to get ideas, information, and resources to help students stay physically active throughout the school day.

The Association Between School-Based Physical Activity, Including Physical Education, and Academic Performance

Incorporate physical activity breaks in the classroom to help keep students focused and well-behaved.

Ideas for classroom physical activity breaks

Make Recess Part of Each School Day

- Schedule at least 20 minutes of recess per day for elementary school students, in addition to their regularly scheduled physical education class.
- Encourage students to play during recess.
  - Provide equipment, such as jump ropes and sports balls.
  - Organize games, such as four-square, active tag, or flag football.
- Provide opportunities for students to be active indoors when the weather is bad or times when outdoor play space is unavailable.

Do Not Use Physical Activity as Punishment

- Do not punish students by forcing them to participate in or by withholding opportunities for physical activity.
  - Do not punish students by requiring them to run laps or do push-ups.
  - Do not exclude students from physical education class or recess.

Children may have negative feelings toward physical activity if they are forced to participate in physical activity as punishment. Further, withholding students from physical education or recess for bad behavior or poor academic performance deprives them of the health benefits of physical activity and the chance to develop essential physical activity skills. Physical education and recess may even improve students' behavior, attention, and test scores.

Include Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Topics in Health Education

- Teach students about healthy eating and physical activity recommendations.
  - Encourage students to participate in 60 minutes or more of physical activity every day, consume a healthy diet based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans,[3] and reduce sedentary screen time (e.g., television, video games, computer usage).
  - Encourage students to identify their own healthy behaviors and set personal goals for improvement.
  - Incorporate health education into other subjects such as math and science.
- Extend healthy lessons outside of school by assigning homework for families to complete together.
- Meet with the school nurse to promote consistent health messages in your classroom. Consider asking the school nurse, or other health services staff, to lead a specific health lesson.

Watch Out for Student Weight Concerns and Stigma

- Address and intervene on all types of bullying, including weight discrimination and teasing about body shape or size.
- Refer students with signs of eating disorders, binge eating, or other weight concerns to the appropriate school staff such as the school nurse, counselor, psychologist, or school social worker.

3. US Department of Agriculture, US Department of Health and Human Services. Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010. 7th ed. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office; 2010.

Encourage Students to Participate in School Physical Activity Programs

- Support students in participating in intramural sport programs, interscholastic sports, physical activity clubs, or walk-and-bike to school programs.
- Promote school-led physical activity events, such as walk to school days, fun runs, and field days.
- Volunteer to organize or provide adult supervision to before and after school physical activity programs.

National Center for Safe Routes to School

CDC's Youth Physical Activity: The Role of Schools

Be a Healthy Role Model

- Model healthy behaviors to students by being active and consuming healthy foods and beverages.
- Get involved in your school's employee wellness program or consider starting one.
  - School wellness programs can include onsite opportunities for physical activity such as walking clubs, point-of-decision prompts that encourage use of stairwells, increased access to healthy foods, educational activities such as lectures or written materials, skill-building activities, or reward programs.

School Employee Wellness: A Guide for Protecting the Assets of our Nation's Schools

Become Familiar with Your School's Health Policies

- Read your district's local wellness policy and understand how the policy affects practices in your classroom.
- Get involved in your school health council or school health team.
  - Suggest that the council or team assess healthy eating and physical activity policies and practices. If there is no school health council or school health team, consider starting one at your school by bringing together a variety of school staff, parents, and community members.

CDC's School Health Index: Self-Assessment & Planning Guide

www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth
www.cdc.gov/bam
1-800-CDC-INFO

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. School Health Guidelines to Promote Healthy Eating and Physical Activity. MMWR 2011; 60(5): 1-76. http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/npao/strategies.htm. Accessed November 21, 2013.