

NUTRITION & HEALTHY EATING

A 3-Week Comprehensive Unit for Grades 6–10

Physical Education & Health

Macronutrients • Food Labels • Portion Distortion

Eating Disorders Awareness • Meal Planning

Grocery Budgeting Simulation

15 Lesson Plans • Activities • Assessments

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Unit Overview

This comprehensive 3-week unit empowers students in Grades 6–10 to take charge of their nutritional health. Through interactive lessons, hands-on activities, and real-world simulations, students will explore macronutrients, decode food labels, understand portion sizes, and develop practical meal planning skills while maintaining a mindful awareness of eating disorders and body positivity.

Unit Objectives

- Identify and explain the functions of macronutrients and micronutrients.
- Analyze and interpret standard food labels and ingredient lists.
- Differentiate between serving sizes and portion sizes.
- Recognize the signs of eating disorders and know where to seek help.
- Design a balanced, budget-friendly meal plan for a week.
- Critically evaluate common nutrition myths using evidence-based research.

Suggested Pacing

Week	Theme	Focus
1	Foundations of Nutrition	Macronutrients, Water, Micronutrients
2	Navigating Food Choices	Food Labels, Portion Distortion, Eating Disorders
3	Application & Meal Planning	Meal Planning, Budget Simulation, Myth-Busting, Review

National Health Education Standards Alignment

Standard 1: Students will comprehend concepts related to health promotion and disease prevention.

Standard 3: Students will demonstrate the ability to access valid information and products and services to enhance health.

Standard 5: Students will demonstrate the ability to use decision-making skills to enhance health.

Standard 7: Students will demonstrate the ability to practice health-enhancing behaviors and avoid or reduce health risks.

WEEK 1

Foundations of Nutrition

Macronutrients, Water & Micronutrients

Lesson 1: Introduction to Nutrition & Wellness

50 min

Objective

Define nutrition and explain its relationship to overall physical, mental, and emotional wellness. Identify the six classes of essential nutrients.

Warm-Up (5 min): Display the prompt: *"You are about to run a marathon. What would you eat the night before, and why?"* Have students discuss in pairs, then share out. Guide the discussion to realize that food is more than just taste—it is functional fuel.

Direct Instruction (15 min): Define **Nutrition** as the science of how the body uses food to meet its needs for growth, repair, and maintenance. Introduce the six classes of nutrients: Carbohydrates, Proteins, Fats, Vitamins, Minerals, and Water. Explain the divide: Macronutrients (Carbs, Proteins, Fats) are needed in large amounts and provide energy (measured in Calories). Micronutrients (Vitamins, Minerals) are needed in smaller amounts and facilitate bodily processes. Water is unique and essential for survival.

Activity: My Nutrition Baseline

Students create a 24-hour recall of everything they ate and drank yesterday. Using colored highlighters, they categorize each item into the 6 nutrient classes. Students identify which nutrient classes are dominant in their diet and which are lacking.

Closure (5 min): Exit Ticket — Name the three macronutrients and explain why the body needs micronutrients if they don't provide energy.

Lesson 2: Carbohydrates – The Body's Fuel

50 min

Objective

Identify the two main types of carbohydrates (simple and complex), their functions in the body, and evaluate food sources for nutritional density. Understand the role of dietary fiber.

Warm-Up (5 min): Prompt: *"Are carbohydrates bad for you? Why or why not?"* Address the common diet-culture myth that all carbs are harmful. Emphasize that type matters.

Direct Instruction (20 min): Explain that carbohydrates are the body's primary and preferred energy source, yielding 4 Calories per gram. Define **Simple Carbohydrates** (sugars): quick energy, found naturally in fruit (fructose) and milk (lactose), but often added as refined sugars (sucrose/high fructose corn syrup) causing energy spikes and crashes. Define **Complex Carbohydrates** (starches and fiber): sustained energy, found in whole grains, legumes, and vegetables. Explain **Dietary Fiber**: a complex carbohydrate the body cannot digest. It aids digestion, regulates blood sugar, and lowers cholesterol. Distinguish between soluble and insoluble fiber.

Carb Type	Function	Food Sources	Energy Delivery
Simple (Natural)	Quick energy, paired with vitamins	Fruits, Milk	Fast
Simple (Added)	Empty calories, quick energy	Candy, Soda, Pastries	Fast (Crash risk)
Complex (Starch)	Sustained energy	Oats, Brown Rice, Potatoes	Slow & Steady
Complex (Fiber)	Digestion, blood sugar regulation	Beans, Veggies, Whole Grains	Non-digestible

Activity: Carb Sorting

Provide students with a list of 15 foods (e.g., apple, white bread, lentils, jelly beans, quinoa). Students must sort them into Simple (Natural), Simple (Added), and Complex (Starch/Fiber) categories and explain their reasoning for two borderline items.

Closure (5 min): Why might an athlete eat a complex carbohydrate meal the night before a race, but a simple carbohydrate snack right before it?

WEEK 2

Navigating Food Choices

Food Labels, Portion Distortion & Awareness

Lesson 6: Decoding Food Labels

50 min

Objective

Identify the key components of a Nutrition Facts label and ingredient list. Explain the difference between serving size and portions, and utilize the % Daily Value (%DV) to evaluate a food's nutritional value.

Warm-Up (5 min): Display a highly deceptive food package (e.g., a snack box claiming 'All Natural' or 'Made with Real Fruit' but containing high sugar). Ask: *"Does 'all natural' mean this is healthy? How can we know for sure?"*

Direct Instruction (20 min): Teach students to flip the package to the back. **1. Serving Size:** The most important part of the label! All numbers below are based on this amount. Note servings per container. **2. Calories:** Total energy provided per serving. **3. % Daily Value (%DV):** Shows how a nutrient fits into a daily 2,000-calorie diet. Rule of Thumb: <5% DV is Low, >20% DV is High. Aim for High in fiber, vitamins, and minerals; Low in saturated fat, sodium, and added sugars. **4. Nutrients to Limit:** Saturated fat, trans fat, sodium, added sugars. **5. Nutrients to Get Enough Of:** Dietary fiber, Vitamin D, Calcium, Iron, Potassium. **6. Ingredients List:** Listed in descending order by weight. The first few ingredients make up the bulk of the food.

Activity: Label Lingo Translation

Students match common front-of-package marketing terms with their actual legal definitions (or lack thereof). Examples: 'Light' (1/3 fewer calories or 50% less fat), 'Low Fat' (3g or less per serving), 'Good Source' (10-19% DV), 'Excellent Source' (20% or more DV), 'Natural' (FDA has no formal definition for this term on labels!).

Closure (5 min): Why is it dangerous to only read the front of a food package?

WEEK 3

Application & Meal Planning

Budgeting, Myth-Busting & Review

Lesson 11: Introduction to Meal Planning

50 min

Objective

Apply knowledge of macronutrients and portion sizes to design a balanced daily meal plan.
Understand the principles of variety, moderation, and nutrient density.

Warm-Up (5 min): Prompt: *"If you had to eat the exact same 3 meals every day for a year, what would they be?"* Discuss how even favorite foods get boring, introducing the concept of dietary variety.

Direct Instruction (15 min): Introduce the USDA MyPlate guidelines as a visual tool for meal planning: 1/2 plate fruits and vegetables, 1/4 plate lean protein, 1/4 plate complex carbohydrates, plus a serving of dairy or fortified alternative. Discuss the 3 Pillars of Meal Planning: **1. Balance:** Including all macronutrient groups to ensure sustained energy and satiety. **2. Variety:** Eating different foods within each group to get a broad spectrum of micronutrients (eating the rainbow). **3. Moderation:** Not eliminating treats, but ensuring nutrient-dense foods form the foundation. Address practical constraints: time, cooking ability, and budget (previewing the upcoming simulation).

Activity: The Perfect Plate Design

Students design a 1-day meal plan (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner, 1 Snack). For each meal, they must diagram the plate using the MyPlate fractions and list the specific foods. They must also justify how their choices meet the 3 Pillars (Balance, Variety, Moderation). Example: 'Lunch is a turkey wrap on whole wheat (complex carb + protein), with spinach and tomatoes (veggies), and an apple on the side (fruit). It has variety because I used 3 different vegetables, and moderation because I used mustard instead of mayo.'

Closure (5 min): What is the hardest part about planning a whole day of meals? How might budget affect these choices?

SUPPLEMENTAL ACTIVITIES

Handouts, Simulations & Resources

Food Label Analysis Activities

Use the following nutrition labels to complete the Compare the Pair activity from Lesson 7. Apply the 5/20 Rule to evaluate the % Daily Value (%DV).

Product A: Regular Fruit Yogurt

Nutrition Facts		
Serving Size: 1 container (150g)		Calories: 150
Total Fat 2g	3% DV	
Saturated Fat 1.5g	8% DV	Trans Fat 0g
Sodium 85mg	4% DV	
Total Carbohydrate 26g	9% DV	
Dietary Fiber 0g	0% DV	Total Sugars 19g
Includes 14g Added Sugars	28% DV	
Protein 6g	12% DV	
Vitamin D 0mcg	0% DV	Calcium 150mg

Ingredients: Cultured Pasteurized Low Fat Milk, Sugar, Strawberries, Corn Starch, Kosher Gelatin.

Product B: Plain Greek Yogurt

Nutrition Facts		
Serving Size: 1 container (150g)		Calories: 100
Total Fat 0.5g	1% DV	
Saturated Fat 0g	0% DV	Trans Fat 0g
Sodium 55mg	2% DV	
Total Carbohydrate 6g	2% DV	
Dietary Fiber 0g	0% DV	Total Sugars 6g
Includes 0g Added Sugars	0% DV	
Protein 17g	34% DV	
Vitamin D 0mcg	0% DV	Calcium 150mg

Ingredients: Cultured Pasteurized Nonfat Milk.

Compare the Pair: Analysis Questions

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