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Fruit + Veg



Plant Fruit + Veg in your Lunchbox

Eating fruit and vegetables at school supports teaching and learning about healthy eating. Schools can facilitate this by having a daily 'fruit + veg break' – a time when only fruit and vegetables are eaten. This encourages children to include fruit and vegetables in their lunchbox everyday. These four case studies, and the checklist at the end, can help you determine how you could introduce or enhance fruit and vegetable initiatives at your school.

Fruit + Veg case study 1: **Eltham North Primary School**

Set in peaceful bushland in outer Melbourne, Eltham North Primary School has 570 students and 23 class teachers. The school introduced a fruit + veg break in 2007 as a way of encouraging students to eat more fruit and vegetables. The break happens every day for the whole school at 10.00am and lasts for ten minutes. This practice is supported by school policy and lessons about healthy eating across all year levels, and has led to new initiatives that promote fruit and vegetable consumption.

Getting started

Before December 2006 the school had no coordinated approach to fruit and vegetable initiatives. Some of the teachers were interested in improving students' eating habits and, as an initial step, attended a Fruit + Veg workshop presented by Home Economics Victoria. One of the ideas presented at the workshop was the fruit + veg break. This idea was proposed at a staff meeting where it was decided that the school would aim to have a daily fruit + veg break at 10.00am in all classes.

Teachers advised parents about the fruit + veg break and which food items were permitted by sending notes home with students. This information was also included in the school's print and online newsletters and explained at parent meetings.

Practicalities

Students bring fruit and vegetables from home every day and eat them straight from their own lunchbox. This means safety and hygiene standards are easily maintained. Fresh fruit and vegetables in reusable containers are encouraged and verbal feedback from teachers helps to reinforce the benefits of eating fruit and vegetables. Teachers have integrated healthy eating topics into the curriculum at each year level which motivates students to bring healthy food options to eat during the school day.

Effective communication with parents has been critical to the successful promotion of fruit and vegetables. Although most parents were supportive of the school's promotion of healthy foods, initially some parents did not understand that the food should be fresh and they sent pre-packaged fruit and fruit roll-ups. This has now ceased as a result of regular articles in the newsletter and verbal information which has filtered through to all families in the school community. Information about healthy eating and foods that are suitable for the fruit + veg break are explained clearly to new parents at interviews and in the handbook they are given when they join the school. In this way the fruit + veg break has become an intrinsic part of the school culture.



Eltham North Primary School does not have a tuckshop but a local shop provides lunch orders once a week. Representatives of the school talked to the shop owners about the school's aim to encourage healthy eating and avoid wasteful packaging and found that the owners were happy to minimise packaging and exclude confectionary and high sugar drinks from the menu.

Ups and downs

Teachers were committed to promoting healthy eating to their students, although initially some teachers were reluctant to allocate class time to a fruit + veg break. After a few weeks of trialling the break the resistant teachers saw how much the students enjoyed the fruit + veg break and found that it helped students to be more alert and better able to engage in classroom activities. Now all teachers see the value of the break and wholeheartedly support it.

A popular offshoot of Eltham North Primary School's fruit + veg break is fruit smoothies. The parents association liaised with local shopkeepers and organised a weekly supply of fruit to the school as part of a government-funded free fruit program. This was originally intended to supplement the fruit students brought from home so that students who forgot to bring fruit and vegetables or brought inappropriate food did not miss out. Now that the break is so well established, students rarely forget so there is often fruit left over towards the end of the week. Instead of letting this fruit go to waste the parents association raised funds to buy blenders so the fruit can be made into smoothies. Every Friday, smoothies are made by parent volunteers and served to students in cups donated by local business. Although there is not enough fruit to make smoothies for the whole school at once, each class enjoys this end-of-the-week treat when it is their turn to have it.

Other tips and suggestions

Healthy eating can be supported by a healthy food policy and other school activities. At Eltham North Primary School the healthy food policy was developed by refining the food policy that was in place at the time the fruit + veg break was introduced. Minimal packaging is also part of the policy and eating unprocessed food without disposable packaging ('nude food') has become a widespread practice in the school's community. This has been helped by the sale of plastic containers through the parents association which is a useful fundraiser for the school. Another popular food-related activity is the cooking club. This is run by teachers and parent volunteers and gives students the opportunity to make lunch using produce harvested from the school's orchard and kitchen garden.

Teachers at Eltham North Primary School found that setting up a fruit + veg break involved a period of trial and adaptation to achieve the right model for the school. Critical success factors may include speaking with or visiting teachers at a school that already has a successful fruit + veg break to learn from their challenges and successes.

Fruit + Veg case study 2: **Echuca South Primary School**

Echuca South Primary School, in northern Victoria, has 275 students in 12 grades. The school did not have a coordinated approach to fruit and vegetable initiatives but in 2007 a timetable change motivated teachers to introduce a mid-morning break so students could rejuvenate in the middle of lessons. The fruit + veg break had the dual purpose of encouraging healthy eating and allowing students to spend morning recess in active play rather than using the time to eat.

Getting started

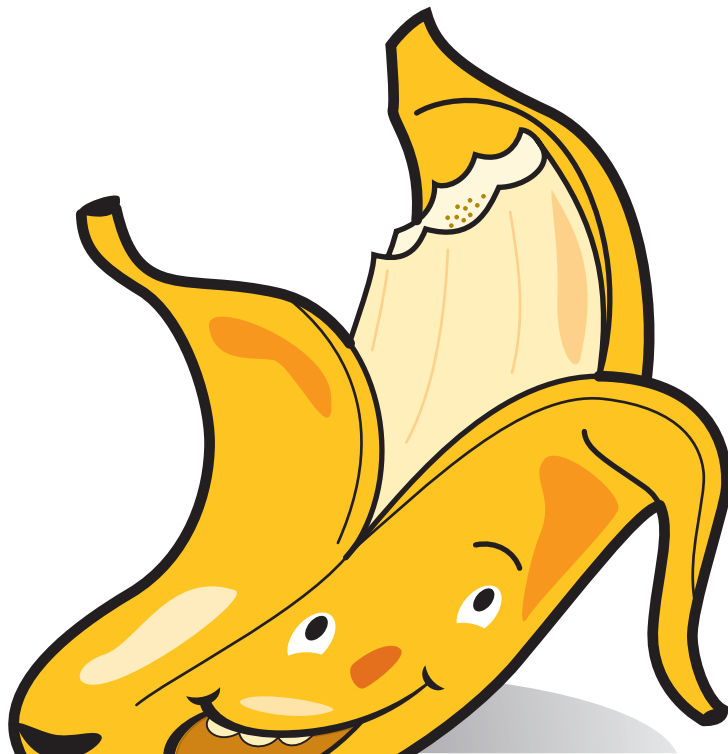
The timetable that was introduced in 2007 began with a two-hour session, followed by outside play for half an hour and then another two-hour session. Some staff felt that students needed a snack to help keep them going. When this was discussed at a staff meeting a fruit break was suggested. This prompted some of the teachers to go to a Fruit + Veg workshop and they then decided to introduce a fruit + veg break in the prep and grade 1 classrooms.

The prep and grade 1 teachers asked their students to bring fruit and vegetables to eat during the morning and sent a note home explaining the fruit + veg break to parents. The school provided a supply of fruit to give to students who did not have their own. The funding for this came from the school's welfare fund. Teachers in the older grades had noticed that students sometimes missed breakfast and had difficulty concentrating during the morning, so once the break was well established in the infant grades it was introduced to the other grades as well.

Practicalities

The daily fruit + veg break runs from 10.00 to 10.30am in every classroom and is supervised by the class teacher. Hard fruits, like apples, are preferred because they are less messy and easier to eat without being cut up. Students can bring sultanas as well as fresh fruit and vegetables. They are encouraged to bring these foods in reusable snap-lock bags or plastic containers. In the younger grades the teacher reads aloud while students eat, in older grades the fruit + veg break coincides with silent reading time.

The school newsletter regularly includes articles about healthy eating and reminds parents about which foods students can bring to eat during the fruit + veg break. Teachers engage students in discussion about nutrition and healthy food choices to encourage students to bring fruit and vegetables to school. From time to time a student may bring packaged or inappropriate foods. When this happens the teacher facilitates a brief discussion about food selection and gives the student fruit and vegetables from a staff room supply. The inappropriate food items are put back in the student's lunchbox.



Echuca South Primary School does not have a canteen but a local business provides lunch orders throughout the week. Staff met with the manager of the business to explain the school's aim to promote healthy eating and avoid unnecessary packaging. The manager readily agreed to support this aim, now overly sweet and fatty foods are not on the menu and a minimum of food packaging is used.

Ups and downs

Teachers have found that the morning fruit + veg break has a number of benefits. It helps students cope with the demanding two-hour blocks enabling them to maintain appropriate behaviour and focus on their school work. Since the break was introduced students across all year groups are willingly eating more fruit and vegetables. The fruit + veg break has also become a social time and a good opportunity for informal discussion about food. Teachers and students often chat about what students are eating at home, or what is growing in the vegie patch, as well as other topics of interest.

Some families had difficulty providing fruit, which prompted staff members to approach the local greengrocer who, on hearing about the program, happily agreed to supply the school. This also meant that a variety of fruit and vegetables were provided giving students a wider range than if it was brought solely from home. This initiative was supported by government funding and is enough to provide fruit and vegetables to the three younger grades. Students in the older grades bring fruit and vegetables from home.

Other tips and suggestions

A healthy food policy can be developed to underpin fruit and vegetable initiatives and more nutritious lunch order menus. At Echuca South Primary School staff members found they could easily adapt the standard Department of Education and Early Childhood Development policy to reflect the school's commitment to promoting nutritious foods to their students. Among other things the policy stipulates that food should not be used to reward students; stickers, class games outside and free time are used instead.

Fruit + Veg case study 3: **Korumburra Primary School**

The Korumburra Primary School in Gippsland has 387 students in 17 classrooms. The school introduced a daily ten minute fruit and water break many years ago because both teachers and parents felt this would be of benefit to students. In 2009 they employed a Healthy Lifestyles Project Officer (HLPO) who increased the school's capacity to focus on healthy eating and coordinated a fruit + veg break as part of the school's life skills program.

Getting started

The school's principal led the initiative to develop the fruit and water break into a fruit + veg break. She developed a comprehensive environment and sustainability policy for the school, including a section about healthy eating, and sought a consistent approach that involved staff, students and the wider school community. The aim was to have happy, healthy, resilient students that enjoy good food and feel good about themselves. Teachers were committed to this and implemented the policy in their classroom by having a time every day when students eat only fruit or vegetables.

Practicalities

The fruit + veg break occurs in all classrooms at a time decided by individual teachers. In many grades it coincides with reading time; either the teacher reading aloud or students reading silently to themselves. During the break students eat fruit and vegetables brought from home and drink tap water. Only hard fruits are eaten to avoid fruit juice dripping onto books. Students have access to water as needed at other times of the day.

The prep to grade 2 classrooms have a fruit bowl that is filled each week with fruit and vegetables from the local supermarket as part of a government-funded free fruit program. Older students cut up seasonal fruit, like watermelon, in the school's kitchen supervised by staff who make sure it is done safely and hygienically. The fruit is put on platters and taken to the younger grades. Students in the older grades bring their own fruit and eat it whole.

After the appointment of the HLPO classes were timetabled to participate in a series of lessons around healthy eating. Students also developed healthy menu choices and then cooked and ate them, sometimes in a classroom 'restaurant'. Where possible the vegetables were picked from the school garden.

Fruit and vegetables are also promoted through the school newsletter, with weekly recipes and information about healthy eating. Information about the school's healthy eating policy is given to new parents at orientation sessions and is included in the school's 'info pack'.



Ups and downs

Korumburra Primary School's broad approach to student health and wellbeing has meant there were no difficulties making fruit and vegetables a regular part of their students' diets. The existing fruit and water break easily became a fruit + veg break and other school activities, like gardening and healthy cooking classes, also promote the benefits of fruit and vegetables.

Students eat their lunch in their classroom supervised by their teacher. There is a pleasant social atmosphere and teachers encourage healthy food choices by facilitating discussion about lunchbox contents and family evening meals.

Other tips and suggestions

Stickers, stamps and prizes can be awarded to motivate students to make healthy food choices. At Korumburra Primary School 'nude food' lunchboxes (reusable plastic containers that fit inside a larger lunchbox) and other prizes were awarded. Many of the prizes were donated by members of the local community.

Korumburra Primary School has a good relationship with their local newspaper and local press coverage of school events, like healthy eating days, increases community interest in the school and helps students to feel their efforts are valued.

Fruit + Veg case study 4: Portland Special Developmental School

Portland Special Developmental School has 33 students ranging from five to eighteen years old. The school aims to promote healthy eating to all students and a balanced diet that includes a variety of fruit, vegetables and whole-grains. The school's five teachers model healthy food choices during mealtimes with the students. Some students refused to even taste fruit, so the school has worked hard and taken small steps to achieve their goal of making fruit and vegetables an important part of the students' lives.

Getting started

Cooking has always been an important part of Portland Special Developmental School's life skills program, but there was no particular emphasis on fruit and vegetables until 2007. Staff at the school began thinking about the importance of fruit and vegetables after the school received an invitation to a Fruit + Veg workshop. One class started having a fruit + veg break and the practice spread to the other three classes as staff moved around the school.

The Principal developed a 'Healthy lunchboxes, healthy breaks policy' that staff implement by

- encouraging students to bring fresh fruit and vegetables to school and eat healthy foods at school
- discouraging students from bringing soft drinks, cordial, chocolate, lollies and chips to school
- acting as role models and eating healthy food at mealtimes with students.

The focus on fruit and vegetables was introduced to parents and the wider school community by the teachers; one class at a time. Teachers spoke to parents individually and at class meetings using the best interests of students as a starting point.

Practicalities

The fruit and vegetable focus is implemented by the teachers in different ways across all classrooms. Junior classes have a 'fruit first' approach to morning tea where students are expected to eat a piece of fruit before they eat any other foods. A lot of fruit is eaten in these classes and teachers make sure that the other snacks students eat at morning tea are healthy foods. Senior classes have a fruit + veg break at 10.00am, rather than waiting for morning tea at 11.00am. Students in all classes usually bring fruit and vegetables from home and a bowl of fruit is kept in every classroom in case it is needed. This extra fruit is paid for by grants from government, local business and the Rotary Club.

The school's healthy eating policy along with permitted foods for the fruit + veg break are explained to parents at Student Support Group meetings. This is followed up with regular information in parent newsletters and notes from teachers in students' personal diaries.



Teachers use non-food rewards to motivate students to eat fruit and vegetables. Star charts and rewards like free choice, excursions, listening to music and having first choice are all popular and effective incentives.

Ups and downs

Some students had restricted their diet by refusing to eat many foods, including fruit and vegetables, and some parents were reluctant to send fresh fruit to school. The school engaged a dietitian who helped parents realise the dietary importance of fruit and vegetables and appreciate the value in persevering with offering a variety of foods to their children. When introducing new foods, teachers found that peer modelling and offering very small amounts were effective ways of overcoming student resistance to trying fruit and vegetables.

Very few of the older students ate fruit or vegetables at school before the focus on healthy eating was increased. However, since the fruit + veg break was introduced nearly all of these students are bringing fruit and vegetables to school and willingly eating a variety of them.

Other tips and suggestions

Portland Special Developmental School found that involving students in food production made it easier to increase the focus on fruit and vegetables. Every classroom has a kitchen with peelers, knives and apple slicer machines, and students are taught the principles of safety and hygiene if fruit and vegetables need to be cut up for fruit + veg break. During the weekly cooking classes, teachers emphasise the use of healthy fresh ingredients and include a variety of fruits and vegetables in the dishes students are cooking for lunch. The school vegetable garden also inspires students to eat the produce they have grown themselves.

Teachers implemented the school's healthy eating policy not only during cooking classes and at fruit + veg break time but also on excursions and camps. If food is used as an incentive or reward teachers make sure healthy options are used and sweet and fatty foods are limited to celebrations and other rare occasions.

And finally

The four schools featured here have approached their fruit + veg breaks in diverse ways but all support the philosophy that a focus on fruit and vegetables is most effective when it is

- part of a comprehensive approach to health and wellbeing
- linked to the curriculum
- supported by parents, the school canteen and behaviour modelled by the teachers.

Fruit and vegetable initiatives checklist

Planning and development

- Investigate how other schools have implemented fruit and vegetable initiatives
- Gain the support of your principal by discussing the benefits of fruit and vegetable initiatives with them
- Promote the benefits of a fruit + veg break at staff meetings and plan a whole school approach
- Develop a whole-school healthy food policy using the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development *School canteens and other school food services policy* as a guide
- Contact relevant health professionals at your local community health service to support your fruit and vegetable initiative (e.g. dietitian, health promotion officer)
- Encourage participation from teachers, parents and students
- Discuss with student leaders how they may assist with promotional activities and be key partners in the fruit and veg initiative

Promotion and implementation

- Send a note home to parents with each student explaining the fruit + veg break and foods that students are permitted to eat during the break
- Discuss the fruit + veg break at parent meetings
- Run an article explaining the fruit + veg break in the school newsletter once or twice a term
- Include healthy eating tips in the school newsletter on a regular basis
- Display a list of foods students are permitted to eat during the fruit + veg break and foods that are not permitted
- Include information about the fruit + veg break in material given to new families and at orientation sessions
- Consider an official 'launch' of the fruit + veg break to create interest and enthusiasm
- Organise a supply of fruit and vegetables to be available for students who do not bring any from home
- Incorporate healthy eating topics into the curriculum for each year level
- Model eating fruit and vegetables for students during the fruit + veg break
- Give verbal feedback to encourage students and reinforce the benefits of eating fruit and vegetables
- Use non-food incentives to recognise student achievement
- Develop relationships with local fruit and vegetable suppliers

Build on your success

- Extend healthy eating practices to excursions and camps
- Negotiate a healthy menu with the school canteen or lunch order provider
- Invite parents to contribute ideas to support the school's healthy eating practices
- Develop activities to support fruit and vegetable initiatives e.g. cooking club, gardening
- Implement an annual review of the school's healthy food policy and practice and invite a local health professional to help review your progress