



Happy Food: How Food Affects Your Brain and Your Body

Year levels 3–4

Resources

- An interactive whiteboard or devices with internet access

Location

The classroom

Duration:
45 minutes

Getting started

- Introduce the phrase ‘a healthy mind in a healthy body’. What does this phrase mean?
- How does it relate to the choices we make about food?
- Read students the poem below and explain that the original poem was written (in Latin) 2000 years ago. It was a recipe for how to be happy.
- What does the poet believe is the key to being happy and healthy? Working hard, being brave but calm, and avoiding excess. Is this still the same today?

‘You should pray for a healthy mind in a healthy body.

Ask for a stout heart that has no fear of death,

and deems length of days the least of Nature’s gifts,

that can endure any kind of toil,

that knows neither wrath nor desire and thinks

the woes and hard labours of Hercules better than

the loves and banquets and downy cushions of Sardanapalus.

What I commend to you, you can give to yourself;

For assuredly, the only road to a life of peace is virtue.’

Juvenal, Roman poet, late 1st or early 2nd century CE

Moody foods

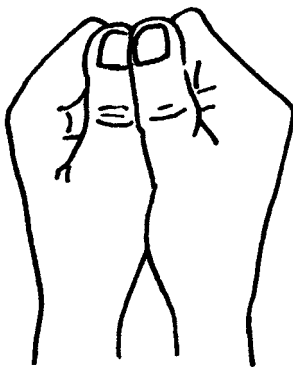
- Foods can affect your mood in a negative way, making you feel sluggish, grumpy and tired, or jittery, jumpy and crabby. Can you think of examples of when food has made you feel this way? For example, you might feel sluggish after a really heavy or filling meal.
- Foods can also affect your mood in a positive way. Can you think of examples of when food has made you feel calm or happy? For example, you might feel happy after eating your favourite food or trying something new.
- When we have eaten a well-balanced meal, not too much and not too little, with fresh and nutritious foods, we can feel well, energetic, relaxed. Is this the same as being happy?
- Ask students: Does being happy come from your brain, your body or your heart? Some people say all three. What do *we* think?

Food for your body

- Food provides our body with energy. Ask students to brainstorm all the things your body needs energy for, such as moving your muscles, breathing, digesting food, growing bones, hair and teeth.
- What do students think will happen to these parts of the body if we don’t get enough food energy or the right food energy? How will this affect our health?
- Are there different kinds of food energy? Talk about jumpy, grumpy energy. ‘It’s a quick burst of energy – zip-zap-zing *but* then you crash!’ (Get all the students to act like spiky lightning bolts.) Foods with ‘empty calories’ cause this – sugary foods that don’t have lots of natural nutrients in them such as lollies, soft drinks and sugary cakes.

- Discuss happy, snappy energy. ‘It’s a cruisy, loosey, jazz-hip kinda feel good.’ (Get all the students to snap their fingers or tap their toes in a jazz rhythm, do a twirl, sit down.) It’s got a bit of quick energy for now and a bit of long energy for later, and you’re going really well through your day without the crash. Foods with proteins and complex carbohydrates make this happen: a good breakfast of oatmeal, fresh eggs, or a plate with a balanced and varied meal such as our kitchen class lunches.
- In pairs or small groups, students make up a brief song or a dance to express their feelings about jumpy, grumpy energy and happy, snappy energy.

Food for thought



- Discuss: The food we eat goes to our muscles for movement. What other parts of our body are affected by the food we eat?
- Ask students to put their fists together at the wrists. Explain that this is about the size of their brain. It’s floppy, delicate and full of water and neurons that mean we can think, move, see and feel. Human brains are large compared to the brains of other animals, and they use a lot of energy.
- Ask the class: If we don’t eat enough nutrients, what happens? We get thin (our muscles waste away), we feel tired (no energy to move), our teeth and hair are poor, we sleep badly.
- What do students think happens to our brain if we don’t eat the right balance of nutrients or drink enough water? How does it affect our concentration in class and our learning when we don’t eat a good breakfast or lunch?
- Play an adapted version of ‘Head, shoulders, knees and toes’ – have a student or students stand up and mime the parts of the body as you read each part of the comic strip below:

<p>Head: Our brains need energy, protein and water. Some foods contain good fats that help your brain grow connections. Dark leafy green vegetables contain brain-happy nutrients, and so do nuts, seeds and lean protein.</p>	<p>Shoulders: For strong bones we need calcium from dark green leafy vegetables, milk and dairy products.</p>	<p>Legs: For muscles, we eat protein from foods such as meat, fish, eggs, cheese, milk, yoghurt, beans and pulses, nuts and seeds.</p>	<p>Jump: For energy we eat foods that sustain us with slow energy, such as oats, or quick energy, such as fruit. We need both.</p>

- Run through ‘Head, shoulders, legs and jump’ (our version) energetically a few times so that the whole class is up and moving for at least 30 seconds.
- Ask: How’s your mood at the moment? Moving about, singing and dancing, can make most people happier.

The UN International Day of Happiness

- Explore the ‘Happy Wall’ on the UN International Day of Happiness website (www.dayofhappiness.net) and upload an entry to the wall of images.
- To explore the UN’s International Day of Happiness in more detail download the related lesson from the Shared Table Resource Library.
- Students use what they have learned about food and happiness to come up with a range of ways to make the classroom or the school a healthier, safer and more active place, such as a daily ‘dancing minute’. Post your ideas on the Shared Table to inspire other schools.