

# idea corner

## Turning Children on to Good Nutrition

Potatochipscokecandypop!  
With a quarter in her jean's pocket, and 10 pennies in his hand, 2 third graders set out across 2 small streets and 1 big one. Destination—candy store!

Children are inundated with television commercials that sell sugared cereals, astronaut-type snacks, pop, candy, and potato chips. "Children's Chowder," a 4-H—EFNEP (Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program) project developed in Washtenaw County, Michigan, is tailored to catch the interest of young children and to counter-balance the power of the television commercial. Committed to the idea that children may be helped to choose wisely between empty calorie foods and foods that do important work in their own bodies, 100 nutrition volunteers worked in 80 elementary school classrooms from September, 1975, to June, 1976, raising the food consciousness of young children throughout the county.

And to supplement the in-school experience, 20 low-income mothers who once hadn't thought of themselves as "4-H People" suddenly became 4-H leaders. They worked with 3-4 children plus their own child in after-school foods and nutrition groups. Although these groups were mini-groups—meeting only for 4 weeks as a start, 1 out of 4 mothers continued working with her small "Mini-Muncher" group or branched out to do 4-H crafts or sewing activities with her older children, too.

In the classroom, children learned quickly when they could relate nutrition activities to their own bodies and to their own experiences!

Martha, a nine-year old, took her turn tracing her friend on a five-foot piece of paper. The tracing done, the two girls searched through magazines for pictures of food. Cutting out pictures of ice cream and bananas, a hamburger bun, and a slice of meat, the girls pasted these food around the outline of the body. Martha drew a line between each food cutout and the parts of the body that especially needed the food. She easily connected a dish of ice cream to a bone, but she was unsure what to do with the banana.

"Every food can't be connected to a special part of your body. Some foods just help other foods to do their job. But they are important too. That's why we need to eat a variety of foods everyday," suggested the nutrition volunteer who worked in the third grade classroom once a week for eight weeks, introducing nutrition concepts to the children.

Mr. Kay's third graders were excited by the nutrition break he introduced to the class. "Adults take coffee breaks," he told the children. "You need a break, too. But when you choose your snack, think about what it does for you." Each day as the children took their break, they evaluated their snacks. And there weren't too many potato-chip people after the fourth day, reported Mr. Kay when the volunteer returned the following week.

In the at-home part of the program, children learned quickly as they diced and sliced, peeled, and pared. Ms. Ward, the parent volunteer, boned-up on good nutrition herself as she began to help the youngsters prepare grilled cheese sandwiches, French toast, and applesauce. Armed with a colorful packet—one that included a Basic 4 Food Chart, a simple booklet with nutrition information, our *Cooking with Kids Cookbook*, and an assortment of nutrition puzzles and games, Ms. Ward met with John, Myra, Martha, Cynthia, and Todd for an hour and a half each week for 4 weeks.



Under Ms. Ward's watchful eye, Myra peeled apples and sliced them into quarters. As the children sat around the table, Cynthia began her favorite game: "Telephone." Cynthia whispered the name of a nutritious snack in Todd's ear. Todd passed the word on to Martha who

finally bent over to whisper it to John. "OK, John. What was the snack word?" asked Ms. Ward. John's eyes sparkled as he blurted out "MASOU." "Oh, no," said Myra. "I said 'peanuts.' And they're in the meat group, too."

Ms. Ward's group was beginning to realize their nutrition education didn't end at the school yard gate. "It's not just what you know in your head—it's also what you put in your mouth" became the philosophy of this small group of 4-H "Mini-Munchers."

With teachers, volunteers, and parents working as partners—in school and after school, wide-eyed first graders and sophisticated sixth graders begin to take the EFNEP good nutrition message to heart!

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