Youth learn Choose MyPlate with new healthy lifestyle education program

AT A GLANCE
University of Idaho Extension led the effort to teach K-fifth graders (1,141 students) about Choose MyPlate, which helps establish healthy eating habits while avoiding developing future chronic diseases.

The Situation
Many children and families today have busy schedules, which makes it hard to sit down regularly for homemade meals. Many kids’ diets include a lot of convenience and takeout food. These foods tend to be unhealthy and can have a negative effect on a child’s health.

Research shows that eating healthy has many benefits for children. It can:

- Stabilize their energy,
- Improve their minds,
- Even out their moods,
- Help them maintain a healthy weight, and
- Help prevent mental health conditions, which include depression, anxiety and ADHD.

Consuming a healthy foods and making nutritious choices are some of the most important ways to prevent the onset of disease. Eating healthy can help prevent many chronic diseases, which include obesity, heart disease, high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes.

Diabetes is growing at an epidemic rate in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), nearly 30 million Americans have diabetes and face its devastating consequences. This is also true in Idaho. Approximately 127,799 people in Idaho, or 10 percent of the population, have diabetes. Diabetes and prediabetes cost an estimated 1.3 billion in Idaho each year. Serious complications from diabetes include heart disease, stroke, amputation, end-stage kidney disease, blindness and death.

Our Response
To help address this situation, “Choose My Plate” was developed to teach youth in kindergarten through fifth grade about nutrition. Students reviewed the five Choose My Plate components and viewed examples within each group. Then, they were asked questions to measure their knowledge of Choose My Plate. Students in kindergarten, first, second and third grades were
then read the story, I Will Never, Not Ever Eat a Tomato, by Lauren Child. Fourth and fifth grade students participated in additional activities to solidify their understanding of Choose MyPlate. The students also learned about the different healthy living programs that are offered through 4-H. The focus areas of the 4-H healthy living programs include nutrition, health and fitness, and food science. In 4-H, youth learn about living a healthy lifestyle through fun hands-on activities and projects. They were then invited to join the 4-H Youth Development program in Minidoka County. Lastly, each student was given a Choose My Plate poster to share with their families as a reminder of what foods to eat and how much exercise they should get every day.

This program reached 1,141 students at two elementary schools in Minidoka County. Forty-six percent of the students were Hispanic. According to a 2016 CDC National Diabetes Examination survey, Hispanics are 1.7 times more likely than non-Hispanic whites to be diagnosed with diabetes. Hispanic women are 1.5 times more likely as non-Hispanic whites to die from diabetes.

**Program Outcomes**

Students were asked several questions to measure their knowledge of Choose My Plate and their intentions to use this knowledge in deciding what to eat. Before the presentation, students were asked if they knew what Choose My Plate was. Nineteen percent said yes. After the presentation, the students were asked knowledge-based questions. The data is presented in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Percent correct or positive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Able to identify a <strong>fruit</strong> group food</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to identify a <strong>vegetable</strong> group food</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to identify a <strong>grain</strong> group food</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to identify a <strong>protein</strong> group food</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to identify a <strong>dairy</strong> group food</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learned something new about Choose My Plate</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will think of Choose My Plate when deciding what to eat</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After participating in Choose My Plate, 10 youth joined 4-H Youth Development in Minidoka County.

**The Future**

University of Idaho Extension will continue to provide nutrition education to 4-H and students in Minidoka County. A variety of teaching methods will continue to be used to teach nutrition topics appropriate for elementary school students.

**References:**


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**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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