

Team Nutrition Policy Statement

Goal

Team Nutrition's goal is to improve children's lifelong eating and physical activity habits by using the principles of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the Food Guide Pyramid.

The Issue: Challenges and Opportunities

Recent studies show that only 1 percent of all children have eating patterns consistent with dietary recommendations.¹ Forty-five percent of America's elementary school children eat less than one serving of fruit and 20 percent eat less than one serving of vegetables on any given day and more than one-half do not meet the recommended number of servings of grains. Only 18 percent of girls ages 9 to 19 meet their calcium requirement, yet milk consumption continues to decline, while the consumption of soft drinks, fruit drinks and fruit-ades increases.² Most U.S. children (about two-thirds) eat more fat than is recommended.³ In addition, a National Center for Health Statistics study showed that 4.7 million U.S. youths ages 6-17 are overweight.⁴ These factors contribute to the incidence of heart disease, stroke, diabetes and other diet-related diseases. They have implications for education, for future health care costs, and for quality of life.

The Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Child Nutrition Programs can be effective vehicles for addressing these problems. The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) are available to all schools. As of March 1999, 96,597 schools provide the NSLP and 71,146 schools provide the SBP. Approximately 57 percent of students attending school choose to eat lunches and 21 percent choose breakfasts for which national nutrition standards have been established. Nutritious snacks are now available through the NSLP for students in school-sponsored after school programs and the Summer Food Service Program is available to provide nutritious meals when school is not session. Children in child care centers and homes have access to meals and snacks through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). The Nutrition Education and Training (NET) Program is authorized at 50 cents per enrolled child to provide state agency grants to coordinate child nutrition programs with nutrition education activities in schools and child care institutions, food service management training of school food

¹ Kathryn A. Munoz, Ph.D., MPH; Susan M. Krebs-Smith, Ph.D., MPH, RD; Rachel Ballard-Barbash, M.D., MPH; and Linda E. Cleveland, MS, RD, "Food Intakes of U.S. Children and Adolescents Compared With Recommendations," *Pediatrics*, Vol. 100, No. 3, September 1997, p. 323.

² National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) 1988-1994, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

³ Continuing Survey of Food Intakes by Individuals (CSFII) 1994 - 1996, U.S. Department of Agriculture, ARS.

⁴ Richard Troiano, Ph.D., RD, "Overweight Prevalence and Trends for Children and Adolescents," *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, Vol. 149, October 1995, pp. 1085-1091.

service personnel and nutrition training for teachers and food service personnel. The NET program has not been funded at that level since 1979 and has no appropriation for fiscal year 1999.

A 1993 USDA study showed that meals served in the Nation's schools generally met the school nutrition programs' historic RDA requirements for calories and key nutrients.⁵ However, the meals did not meet additional, more current nutrition standards, as reflected in the Dietary Guidelines. Special concern was focused on the fat and saturated fat content of school meals. Subsequently the school meal requirements were changed to include the more current nutrition standards. A 1997 USDA study found that meals served in the CACFP also needed improvement to be consistent with recommendations.⁶ The meal standards themselves did not need to be revised but additional technical support, similar to that provided to schools, needed to be made available to CACFP.

The Response: Team Nutrition

In order to address these issues, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) developed Team Nutrition, an integrated, behavior-based, comprehensive plan for promoting the nutritional health of the Nation's school children. The policy foundation for Team Nutrition was the School Meals Initiative for Healthy Children regulation that updated the nutrition standards for school meals and recognized the importance of training and technical assistance for school food service professionals and nutrition education for students.

Team Nutrition develops messages and materials that can be used consistently throughout the country. It promotes support and training at the State and local levels through infrastructures developed by the NET Program as well as new Team Nutrition partnerships.

Strategies

Team Nutrition is implemented through three behavior-oriented strategies:

- 1) providing training and technical assistance for Child Nutrition food service professionals to help them serve meals that look good, taste good and meet nutrition standards;
- 2) providing multifaceted, integrated nutrition education for children and their parents. This education will build skills and motivation for children to make healthy food and physical activity choices as part of a healthy lifestyle; and
- 3) providing support for healthy eating and physical activity by involving school administrators and other school and community partners.

Six communication channels are utilized. These include: 1) food service initiatives, 2) classroom activities, 3) school-wide events, 4) home activities, 5) community programs and events, and 6) media events and coverage. These channels offer a comprehensive network for delivering consistent nutrition messages to children and their caretakers which will educate them about the importance of healthy eating and reinforce the messages through a variety of sources.

⁵ John Burghardt and Barbara Devaney, "The School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study," U.S. Department of Agriculture, FNS, October 1993.

⁶ Frederic B. Glanz; David T. Rodda; Mary Jo Cutler; William Rhodes; and Marian Wrobel; "Early Childhood and Child Care Study: Profile of Participants in the CACFP," U.S. Department of Agriculture, FCS, July 1997.

- **Training and Technical Assistance**

Team Nutrition's training and technical assistance focuses on four behavior outcomes for school and child care food service professionals:

- ◆ Planning and preparing healthy meals that appeal to ethnic and cultural taste preferences in all Child Nutrition Programs;
- ◆ Linking meals programs to other educational activities, such as learning in the classroom and developmental progress in child care;
- ◆ Providing nutrition expertise and awareness to the school or child care community; and
- ◆ Using sound business practices to assure the continued availability of healthy meals and the financial viability and accountability of school meal programs.

- **Nutrition Education**

Team Nutrition promotes comprehensive, behavior-based, nutrition education to enable children to make healthy eating and physical activity choices. Social cognitive theory is the foundation of efforts to help children understand how eating and physical activity affect the way they grow, learn, play, and feel today as well as the relationship of their choices to lifelong health. These efforts are designed to increase their understanding that healthy eating and physical activity are fun and that skills developed today will assist them in enjoying healthy eating and physical activity in later years.

Because studies show that eating habits established early in life tend to persist into adulthood, Team Nutrition focuses primarily, though not exclusively, on children in preschool, elementary, and middle school grades. All Team Nutrition messages are based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the Food Guide Pyramid. Team Nutrition's nutrition education focuses on four behavior outcomes for children:

- ◆ Eat a variety of foods;
- ◆ Eat more fruits, vegetables and grains;
- ◆ Eat lower fat foods more often; and
- ◆ Be physically active.

Historically, Team Nutrition focused on the first three behavior outcomes. The fourth behavior outcome, "Be physically active," was added when the 1995 Dietary Guidelines included the importance of physical activity to diet and overall health. To reflect this addition, the theme for all program materials will now be, "Making food and physical activity choices for a healthy lifestyle."

Nutrition education messages are delivered through Team Nutrition's six reinforcing communication channels, targeting children, as well as the adults who care for them and can influence their behavior. Children are reached where they live, learn, and play--using words and style they understand, through media they see and hear every day. Hands-on activities are often used to build skills and motivation. Influential adults in this process include parents, teachers, coaches, health professionals, leaders of children's organizations, and other prominent members of the community.

- **School and Community Support**

School and community leadership that supports healthy eating and physical activity is necessary for success. Team Nutrition efforts in this area focus on agencies and organizations that actively support Team Nutrition goals and on decision makers within school systems such as school administrators, principals, teachers and boards of education. Persons in these positions can provide support for Team Nutrition activities and help create a healthy school environment. They often make decisions that have significant effects on Team Nutrition's goal to improve children's eating and physical activity habits.

School and community support for healthy eating and physical activity focuses on three behavior outcomes for school and community leaders:

- ◆ Adopting and implementing school policies that promote healthy eating and physical activity;
- ◆ Providing school resources adequate to achieve success; and
- ◆ Fostering school and community environments that support healthy eating and physical activity.

Decisions that have an impact on this support include curriculum choices, in-service training, dining room facilities, meal schedules and supervision, financial management and availability of vending machines, snack bars, etc. Team Nutrition messages are delivered through the provision of healthy food choices to allow students to use the knowledge they have gained in the classroom to practice healthy behaviors in the dining room; classroom education to teach nutrition concepts; school-wide events to make food, nutrition and physical activity fun; home activities to reinforce what children learn at school; community programs and events initiated by the schools and community partners to expand the reach of Team Nutrition messages; and local media coverage of nutrition events to enhance community support.

Strategic Approaches

Team Nutrition uses a multi-faceted approach. Some of the strategies are traditional, such as developing and distributing nutrition education materials. Others expand the traditional role of the dining room by encouraging links with the classroom to provide opportunities for social interaction and adult and peer modeling of positive eating behaviors. Still others uniquely apply more innovative techniques to the Child Nutrition Programs; these include developing public/private partnerships and employing social marketing methods.

- **The Dining Room As a Learning Center**

Team Nutrition assists food service professionals in providing a link between the dining room and the classroom curriculum and other learning activities. Team Nutrition also provides teachers with tools that integrate the theme "making food and physical activity choices for a healthy lifestyle," into children's every day learning activities. In addition, Team Nutrition promotes the dining room as a learning laboratory where children can practice and enjoy making nutritious food choices, learn important social interactions, and see practical food-related applications of classroom learning, such as measurement (e.g., liquid and solid measures), geography (e.g., agricultural and cultural differences), and science (e.g., energy intake and expenditure).

- **Public/Private Partnerships**

Team Nutrition uses an extensive, nationwide network of public and private organizations in developing and disseminating products, including private sector companies, nonprofit organizations, and advocacy groups. The purpose of these relationships is to leverage resources, expand the reach of messages, and build a broad base of support. Team Nutrition builds the following relationships:

- ◆ Team Nutrition partners on a limited, strategic basis, with targeted national organizations to develop and disseminate nutrition messages.
- ◆ Team Nutrition engages in broad-based, consistent, continual relationships with other Federal entities (e.g., Extension Service, Department of Education, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) to promote Comprehensive School Health issues, school self assessments and social marketing strategies.
- ◆ Team Nutrition works with state and local entities that operate Child Nutrition Programs and coalitions with related interests or goals to facilitate activities at the local level.

- **Social Marketing**

Social marketing adapts commercial marketing techniques to public initiatives, like Team Nutrition, with the goals of changing behavior to improve individual well being, and creating a social climate that encourages and welcomes changes. This strategy requires understanding the circumstances and needs of all segments of the target audience to determine the most effective messages and communication channels for each segment. Because people change, programs that employ social marketing are dynamic and

continually evolving. In addition to delivering its messages through traditional education resources, Team Nutrition uses the media and computer technology to communicate consistent positive messages and themes as widely as possible to its target populations in order to increase its effectiveness.

Roles and Responsibilities

Team Nutrition success depends on effective partnerships among federal, state and local agencies that administer child nutrition programs. Team Nutrition schools are the focal point for this initiative; however the following roles and responsibilities at each level are critical.

Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), USDA

- Establish policy
- Develop materials that meet needs identified by FNS and its state and local partners
- Disseminate materials in ways that meet state and local needs
- Develop partnerships with other Federal agencies and national organizations
- Promote Team Nutrition's messages through the national media

State Agencies

- Make recommendations to FNS regarding TN materials and dissemination methods
- Provide training and technical assistance to strengthen current Team Nutrition Schools
- Recruit new Team Nutrition schools
- Develop partnerships with other state agencies and organizations
- Promote Team Nutrition messages through the state media

School Districts and other School Food Authorities

- Recruit Team Nutrition Schools
- Receive Team Nutrition materials from FNS, distribute to schools and provide training for their use
- Develop partnerships with other school district departments and community organizations
- Coordinate Team Nutrition activities among schools – especially community events
- Provide support as needed by Team Nutrition Schools

Schools

- Offer a variety of healthy menu choices
- Provide behavior-based nutrition education in pre-K through grade 12
- Establish policy and provide resources that ensures a school environment supportive of healthy eating and physical activity
- Involve parents and the community in Team Nutrition activities that reinforce Team Nutrition messages
- Establish partnerships among teachers, food service staff, school administrators, parents, community leaders and the media

Future Course of Action

With an annual budget of approximately \$10 million, Team Nutrition will be guided by the following themes in selecting the activities to pursue.

- Team Nutrition will continue to focus on the school meal programs, Child and Adult Care Food Program and the Summer Food Service Program. In addition, Team Nutrition will coordinate with other FNS nutrition education programs such as the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children and the Food Stamp Program to reach children and parents through multiple community channels with uniform and reinforcing messages.
- Team Nutrition began its efforts by inviting schools to volunteer to be "Team Nutrition Schools." These schools made a commitment to take the lead in making nutritional changes, conducting nutrition education activities and events, and using innovative new materials from FNS. Team Nutrition will continue to enroll schools, support the continued active participation of current Team Nutrition Schools and expand the use of Team Nutrition materials. Emphasis will be placed on working through State agencies to recruit Team Nutrition Schools as well as develop training support systems necessary for local implementation.
- Team Nutrition will focus on using the six communication channels in implementing Team Nutrition activities in schools and communities. Evaluation of the Team Nutrition pilot communities showed that working through multiple channels, (1. food service initiatives; 2. classroom activities; 3. school-wide events; 4. home activities; 5. community programs and events; and 6. media events and coverage), contributed to increased success.
- Team Nutrition will put a greater emphasis on developing activities and materials that are sensitive to diversity — literacy level, language, culture, income level, and time availability — of the families whose children participate in the Child Nutrition Programs.
- Team Nutrition will focus on identifying and cultivating Partners and Supporters, including nutrition, health, education, entertainment, and industry groups, that will promote Team Nutrition messages within schools and communities. Partners will play a large role on a national level to help get the message out to target audiences. Supporters will be identified at the national, State or local level and will help promote Team Nutrition in a variety of ways at either the national, State or local level.

Current Products and Activities

Team Nutrition has produced a variety of products and promoted a number of activities. A list and description can be found on the Team Nutrition Home Page, Resource Section. The Home Page can be accessed at:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn>