

Elementary students taught about internal cues to regulate food intake

AT A GLANCE

University of Idaho Extension taught elementary school students in Franklin County about using the internal cues of hunger and fullness to regulate food intake.

The Situation

There is much societal concern about childhood overweight and obesity. Consequently, there have been many programs to prevent or treat these conditions focusing on controlling external factors to food intake and activity level. Research indicates that few have lasting success. An alternative is to use internal cues of hunger and fullness to regulate food intake promoted by a growing number of healthcare providers and research studies.

Our Response

A presentation, "Hunger and Fullness," was developed to teach elementary-age students to listen to internal cues of hunger and fullness for regulating food intake. Children learned about hunger, how to recognize physical signs of hunger, the difference between hunger and appetite (a psychological desire to eat), the actual size of their stomach, fullness, how to recognize the physical signs of fullness and strategies for waiting to eat until hungry and stopping when full. Additionally, children watched a demonstration about how their stomach is like a balloon and can stretch and get bigger. Younger students listened to *A Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle, a children's book in



A hungry girl sits at a table bringing a fork filled with spaghetti to her mouth. Stock Photo: www.onepixel.com

which the main character responds to hunger in a variety of ways.

Approximately 665 students were taught in two Franklin County elementary schools. The majority of the students were Caucasian with 8 percent Hispanic/Latino and 2 percent American Indian, Black, Pacific Islander, Asian or two or more races.

Program Outcomes

Students in grades 3-5 completed an evaluation immediately after the class. The number (n) of students answering the questions was 402. A frequency test was used to determine the percentage of students answering a certain way. Results are shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Percentage answering knowledge question correct on post-test (n=402)

Question	Percentage
How do you know when your body needs food?	94%
What is one physical sign you need to eat?	73%
How do you know when your body has had enough to eat?	93%
What is one physical sign to stop eating?	43%

Table 2: Percentage indicating intention to often or always do behavior (n=402)

Behavior	Percentage
I will wait to eat until I am hungry.	51%
I will stop eating when I am full and satisfied.	66%

Results showed that a majority of students answered the knowledge questions on the post-test correctly indicating that they learned or already knew about listening to internal cues to regulate food intake. The exception is the question about identifying a physical sign to stop eating. After reviewing the question further, three of the four possible choices could potentially be considered correct especially from the viewpoint of a child (with the one that 43 percent chose as the best answer). The frequency of the students that selected all three potentially correct answers was 95 percent.

Additionally, a little over half of the students indicated that they would always listen to internal cues to regulate food intake.

The Future

Healthy lifestyle education programs for youth will continue to be taught in elementary schools and in out-of-school settings in Franklin County. Other topics that will be taught include eating mindfully, media and body image, and yoga.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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