



United States Department of Agriculture

# Maximizing the Message:

## Helping Moms and Kids Make Healthier Food Choices

Food and Nutrition Service



# Acknowledgements

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) recognizes the following persons for providing their extensive technical expertise and guidance in the development of the FNS core nutrition messages and the related resources:

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# I. Speaking With One Voice

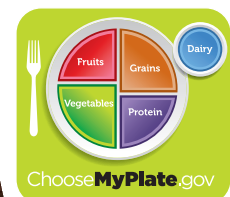
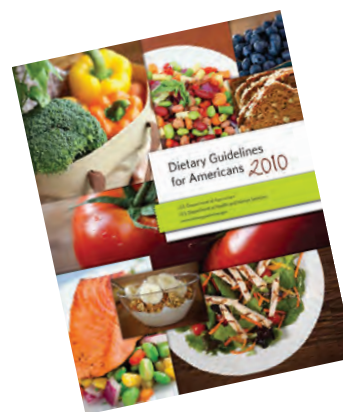
The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) administers 15 nutrition assistance programs. In Fiscal Year 2008, an estimated \$750 million in Federal funds was spent providing much needed nutrition education to program participants, empowering low-income families and children to use their food benefits to make healthful food choices. States also contribute millions to support this effort. Together, we can get the most out of this investment by *maximizing our nutrition messages*.

People are bombarded by various messages every day. How can we make sure our messages are heard, remembered, and effective in compelling the families we serve to take action? We can increase the visibility and repetition of our messages by “speaking with one voice.” We maximize our message impact when all FNS programs work together to deliver consistent, accurate, and consumer-tested messages. Together, we can make a greater difference.

This guide presents core nutrition messages and supporting content (e.g., bulleted tips, recipes, and stories) that are specifically designed for the low-income mothers and children. These messages are based upon the *2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and *MyPlate* and support program policies and food packages.

Low-income mothers and children have guided the development of these messages—discover what they had to say about these new resources inside this publication.

We invite you to use the core messages in your nutrition education efforts to help mothers take incremental steps towards adapting the recommended eating patterns. Collaborating with others in your community to promote the core messages can take this effort to “speak with one voice” one step further. Other organizations may also be able to address broader environmental changes that make it easier for mothers and children to make healthy food choices. Inside this guide, we have provided tips for putting the core messages into practice, and we hope you'll share your ideas with us.





## II. Message Audience

*Maximizing the Message*...provides you with 29 audience-tested nutrition messages, as well as supporting content, that address important diet-related behaviors influencing the health of low-income mothers and children. Specifically, core nutrition messages are provided for the following audience segments:

- Low-income mothers of preschool-age children (2- to 5-year-olds)
- Low-income mothers of elementary school-age children (6- to 10-year-olds)
- Eight- to ten-year-old children



### Figure A: Making a Bigger Impact—Together

Low-income mothers and their children are served by several Federal nutrition assistance programs. When these programs communicate the core nutrition messages to their participants, we can reach millions of mothers and children. The opportunity for message repetition is also greater since many moms participate or have children who participate in multiple programs. Examples of USDA programs include:

- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)\*  
In Fiscal Year 2011, 5.2 million women ages 18 to 50 lived in SNAP households with children 3 to 10 years of age.<sup>1</sup>
- Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)  
In Fiscal Year 2010, on average, 4.8 million children 1 to 4 years old participated in WIC each month.<sup>2</sup>
- National School Lunch Program (NSLP)  
In 2011, an estimated 24.6 million children were between the ages of 6 and 11 years old.<sup>3</sup> Most of these children were eligible to participate in the NSLP.

\* Formerly known as the Food Stamp Program. The name changed on October 1, 2008.





# III. Behavioral Outcomes, Concepts, and Messages

Messages directed to mothers have the potential to affect what moms eat and their children's diets. Women are still the primary food shoppers and meal preparers in most households.<sup>4</sup> Moms are also more likely than dads to eat breakfast and dinner with their children—even in two-parent households.<sup>5</sup> As such, moms have the power to change what food is available in the home, how food is offered and prepared, and their children's attitudes and feelings about food.

The core nutrition messages reflect USDA's goals and guiding principles of nutrition education, which are delivered through nutrition assistance programs. These messages can augment well-designed, theory-based initiatives that support the behavioral outcomes listed in Figure B.

Concepts for the core nutrition messages address five mediators (influences) of children's dietary behavior. For instance, messages for moms of elementary school-age children address the availability and accessibility of fruits and vegetables in the home (a mediating environmental variable).

Message concepts (and the mediating variables they are based upon) apply to constructs in theories frequently used to explain dietary behavior (e.g., self-efficacy, observational learning, social influence/support, and skill building),

as well as intrapersonal, social, and physical environmental factors outlined in ecological models. In other words, the core messages address factors that influence the likelihood that children will eat fruits and vegetables, drink fat-free or low-fat milk at meals, etc. Following our example above, kids are more likely to eat fruits and vegetables when they are available and accessible in the home. Message concepts are described in the following paragraphs.

## Role Modeling

These messages encourage mothers to set a good example by eating fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat milk and other dairy products themselves. Several studies have shown that children's consumption of fruits and vegetables is correlated with parents' intake and children's attitudes about fruit.<sup>6-9</sup>

### Figure B: Behavioral Outcomes

- Mothers and their children consume recommended amounts of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
- Mothers eat and prepare foods together with their 2- to 5-year-old children more often.
- Mothers allow their 2- to 5-year-old children to decide whether and how much to eat.
- Mothers and their 2- to 10-year-old children consume recommended amounts of milk and milk products, choosing primarily low-fat and fat-free options.

Similarly, research suggests that role modeling by parents may contribute to increased intake of whole grains among elementary school children.<sup>10</sup> Children are also more likely to eat new foods when they see a parent consuming them.<sup>11</sup>

### **Cooking and Eating Together**

Families that eat dinner together tend to have more healthful dietary intake patterns that are higher in fruits, vegetables, and calcium and lower in saturated fat.<sup>12-15</sup> Eating meals together also provides opportunities for role modeling as previously explained. Some research indicates that watching television while eating together may reduce the positive effects of family meals.<sup>16-17</sup> Family meals may have a greater positive effect on children's diets when the meal is prepared at home.<sup>16</sup> Involving preschoolers in food preparation may also help make new foods more familiar and can help motivate children to try new foods.

### **Division of Feeding Responsibility**

Messages under this concept are based upon the delineation of parent and child feeding roles where the parents decide what, when, and where foods are offered and the child decides whether and how much to eat.<sup>18</sup>

Research suggests that infants and very young children have the ability to self-regulate the amount of food they consume when given the opportunity.<sup>19-28</sup> While intake at specific meals may be erratic, caloric intake over the course of the day is relatively well regulated. However, child feeding practices (i.e., when moms are not responsive to child feeding cues) may disrupt children's abilities to eat when they are hungry and

stop eating when they are full.<sup>19, 29-31</sup> Differences in children's abilities to self-regulate energy intake appear in preschoolers, and these differences are even more pronounced in older children.<sup>32-35</sup>

The amount and way that food is provided can also make a difference. Mothers may serve larger portions than their children can consume and then use pressure or coercion to get their children to eat "enough." Some research has shown that simply by serving large portions, moms may be causing children to eat more.<sup>36-38</sup>

Child feeding practices may also influence the development of food preferences in children. Research suggests that the use of pressure or rewards may decrease children's preferences for foods. Children may then eat less of these foods when the reward or pressure is no longer present. The number of times mothers expose children to new foods also appears to influence food preferences.<sup>37</sup>

### **Availability, Accessibility, and Awareness**

Messages under this concept focus on increasing the availability and accessibility of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat milk at home and encouraging/motivating kids to eat them. The availability and accessibility of (i.e., ready to eat and easy to get to) fruits and vegetables has been shown to be a critical factor in the consumption of fruits and vegetables by elementary school-age children.<sup>40-45</sup> One study showed that accessibility is particularly important when children "dislike" fruits and vegetables.<sup>46</sup> Another study showed a similar relationship between whole-grain intake and home availability among elementary school children.<sup>47</sup>

Research indicates that awareness of the health benefits of whole grains, how to identify them, and knowledge of serving sizes correlated with higher intakes of whole grains among adults.<sup>48</sup> Conversely, adults and children often cite a lack of understanding of the health benefits of whole grains as one of the reasons they do not choose whole-grain foods.<sup>49</sup> Other findings suggest that consumers who perceive grain consumption as important and read food labels during shopping tend to eat more whole grains than other people.<sup>50</sup>

Research indicates that health concerns also play a role in how women choose dairy foods, particularly in the prevention of osteoporosis and cardiovascular disease and achieving an acceptable body weight.<sup>51</sup>

### **Food Preferences, Beliefs, and Asking Behaviors**

Messages for 8- to 10-year-old children are designed to make fruits, vegetables, milk, and milk products more appealing to children. The messages for children complement messages for mothers, providing motivation for children to consume the fruits, vegetables, and milk products that mothers are making available and accessible in the home. By influencing children's beliefs about these foods, we can also increase the

likelihood that children will ask mom to provide them. Studies indicate that women choose foods to satisfy other family members' needs and preferences.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, this reinforcement may further strengthen moms' commitment to making fruits, vegetables, and milk products available and accessible.<sup>52-53</sup> The impact of messages designed to influence children's food preferences and food purchase requests has been seen in commercial advertising.<sup>54</sup> A major challenge in creating messages is that children see health issues as a distant problem and tend to base their food choices on taste, availability, and accessibility.<sup>55</sup> Messages that appeal to children's desires to have energy for play and sports and to "maximize their potential" are preferred.<sup>55</sup> Including a sense of fun, fantasy, and challenge can also help capture kids' attention and stimulate their motivation to learn.<sup>56-59</sup>

## Figure C: FNS Core Nutrition Messages

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The 29 core nutrition messages address five main topics: fruits and vegetables, cooking and eating together, child feeding [division of feeding responsibilities (DFR)], milk, and whole grains. The messages are for mothers of preschoolers, mothers of elementary school-age children, and 8- to 10-year-old children. These consumer-tested messages and supporting content (tips, advice, stories, recipes, etc., located in the appendixes) address mediating factors such as availability, accessibility, awareness, social influences/support, role modeling, asking skills, and others. These messages may be used alone or with the supporting messages and/or others to create a variety of materials. For application ideas, see Chapter V, Appendix D and <http://www.fns.usda.gov/core-nutrition>.

### Messages for Mothers of Preschoolers

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#### *Fruit and Vegetables*

1. **They learn from watching you.** Eat fruits and veggies and your kids will too.
2. **They take their lead from you.** Eat fruits and veggies and your kids will too.

#### *Cooking and Eating Together Messages*

1. **Cook together.** Eat together. Talk together. Make mealtime a family time.
2. **Make meals and memories together.** It's a lesson they'll use for life.
3. **Enjoy each other while enjoying family meals.** Keep mealtime relaxed to nourish the body and help your family make stronger connections. Let your little ones select which foods to put on their plates and how much to eat from the healthy choices you provide.

#### *Division of Feeding Responsibility Messages*

1. **Let them learn by serving themselves.** Let your kids serve themselves at dinner. Teach them to take small amounts at first. Tell them they can get more if they're still hungry.
2. **Sometimes new foods take time.** Kids don't always take to new foods right away. Offer new fruits and veggies many times. Give them a taste at first and be patient with them.
3. **Patience works better than pressure.** Offer your children new foods. Then, let them choose how much to eat. Kids are more likely to enjoy a food when eating it is their own choice. It also helps them learn to be independent.
4. **Feed their independent spirit at mealtimes.** Each meal with your preschoolers is a chance to help them grow and learn to make some decisions on their own. Encourage them to make their own food choices from the healthy foods you offer. Start early and you'll help them build healthy eating habits for life.
5. **Let go a little to gain a lot.** It's natural for moms to worry about their preschoolers' eating habits. Offer healthy foods and let your kids choose from them. They'll be more likely to enjoy mealtime and eat enough, so everyone is happier.
6. **Think beyond a single meal. Keep in mind what your child eats over time.** Meals and healthy snacks give children several chances every day to eat a variety of foods. If your child eats only a little or nothing at one meal, don't worry. Your child will make up for it with other meals and snacks to the foods needed for good health over time.

\* Consumer-tested supporting content (e.g., bulleted tips, stories, or recipes) is provided for these messages in the Appendixes.

### ***Milk Messages***

1. **Mom is a child's first teacher.** You teach by doing. Every time you drink fat free or low fat (1%) milk, or eat low-fat yogurt, you're giving your kids a lesson in how to eat for better health. It's a lesson they can use for all their lives.
2. **Strong bodies need strong bones.** Give your preschooler fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk or yogurt at meals and snacks. They're packed with vitamins, minerals, and protein for strong, healthy bones.

### ***Whole Grains Messages***

1. **Start them early with whole grains.** It's easy to get your kids in the habit of eating and enjoying whole grains if you start when they are young. Whole grains give your kids B vitamins, minerals, and fiber to help them be strong and healthy.
2. **Happy Kids, Happy Tummy.** Serve your little ones whole-grain versions of their favorite bread, cereal, or pasta. It's a simple way to help them eat more whole grains. And, eating more whole grains that are higher in fiber can make potty time easier, too.

## **Messages for Mothers of Elementary School-Age Children**

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### ***Fruits and Vegetables Messages***

1. **Want your kids to reach for a healthy snack?** Make sure fruits and veggies are in reach.
2. **When they come home hungry, have fruits and veggies ready to eat.**
3. **Let your kids be "produce pickers."** Help them pick fruits and veggies at the store.

### ***Milk Messages***

1. **They're still growing.** Help your kids grow strong. Serve fat-free or low-fat milk at meals.
2. **Milk matters.** Children of every age, and adults too, need the calcium, protein, and vitamin D found in milk for strong bones, teeth, and muscles. Serve fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk or yogurt at meals and snacks.
3. **There's no power like Mom Power.** You are a positive influence in your children's lives. Help them develop healthy eating habits for life. Offer them fat-free or low fat (1%) milk and yogurt at meals and snacks.\*

### ***Whole Grains Messages***

1. **Give yourself and those you love the goodness of whole grains.** Make at least half of the grains you eat whole grains – such as bread, tortillas, pasta, and cereals. Whole grains are good for your heart and digestion, and can help you maintain a healthy weight and good overall health.\*
2. **Whole grains make a difference.** Whole grains help keep your heart healthy and are good for digestion and a healthy weight. Choose foods with "100% whole wheat" or "100% whole grains" on the label. Or check the ingredient list to see if the word "whole" is before the first ingredient listed (for example, whole-wheat flour). If it is, it's whole grain.\*
3. **Start every day the whole-grain way.** Help your kids get their day off to a healthy start. Serve whole-grain versions of cereal, bread, tortillas, or pancakes at breakfast. Whole grains give your kids B vitamins, minerals, and fiber to help them feel full longer so they stay alert to concentrate at school.

## Messages for 8- to 10-Year-Old Children

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### *Milk and Fruits and Vegetable Messages*

Note: Milk and yogurt messages must be paired with images depicting low-fat or fat-free milk or yogurt.

1. **Eat smart to play hard.** Drink milk at meals.
2. **Fuel up with milk at meals.** And soar through your day like a rocket ship.
3. **Eat smart to play hard.** Eat fruits and veggies at meals and snacks.
4. **Fuel up with fruits and veggies.** And soar through your day like a rocket ship.
5. **Snack like a super hero.** Power up with fruit and yogurt.

\* These messages were tested with moms of preschoolers and moms of elementary school-age kids. Both groups found them relevant, clear, feasible, and motivational, so they can be used to reach both groups of moms.

# IV. Message Development and Testing

The audience-focused approach used in the development of the core messages included input from program stakeholders and the target audiences via focus group testing. This process helped create core nutrition messages that are:

- **Accurate.** All messages and supporting content are accurate and consistent with the 2010 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and *MyPlate*.
- **Easy-to-read.** Messages and supporting content are written at a 4th-5th grade reading level as determined by SMOG and Fry readability formulas. Focus group testing also explored whether participants understood messages and content.
- **Emotionally based.** Focus group testing explored participants' feelings about being mothers, feeding their children, and the emotionally based rewards of making changes in how and what they feed their children. This information was used in the early development of the messages to create an emotional pull that helps compel moms to take action. Later focus group testing assessed whether these messages resonated with the target audiences.

"I see my daughter peeping around the corner seeing what [I'm] eating and running in and saying, 'I want some, I want some.'"

-Mother of preschooler, Birmingham, AL

## Core Messages Workgroup

FNS collaborated with partners in developing the initial and subsequent messages and related material. The Core Nutrition Messages Workgroups deliberated and made recommendations regarding the behavioral focus, target audience, concepts, and scope of the core messages and supporting content. Workgroup members for both Phase 1 and Phase 2 included representatives from FNS Programs (SNAP, WIC, Food Distribution, Child Nutrition programs), USDA Agricultural Research Service, Children's Nutrition Research Center and other Federal agencies (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; National Institutes of Health), and professional groups (National WIC Association, School Nutrition Association, Association of State & Territorial Public Health Nutrition Directors). See the acknowledgements for a list of workgroup members.



## Messages That Matter: What Moms and Kids Told Us in Focus Group Testing

The developmental process for these materials included two phases, each consisting of multiple rounds of focus groups. These focus groups provided formative input as well as feedback on the messages at key points in the developmental cycle. The focus group testing provided insights into what worked and what didn't work. The findings provided in this chapter explain why the core messages are worded a particular way. These insights can help you reflect the tone and spirit of the messages in other materials you may develop. Because this research was conducted among small samples of our target audiences, the findings should be viewed as instructive but not definitive.

### Focus Groups

Thirty focus groups were held in eight States between December 2007 and July 2008 to guide the development of the initial set of messages and supporting content about milk, fruits and vegetables, and child feeding.

In December 2010 and May 2011, another 48 focus groups were held in 6 States to inform development of additional messages, supporting content, and communication tools for milk, whole grains, and child feeding. Table 1 contains a list of the locations for the focus groups. A total of 316 mothers and 146 children participated in these groups.

All participants (Table 2) had household incomes at or below 185 percent of the Federal poverty line; over half of the households were participating or had children participating in the SNAP, NSLP, and/or WIC. Thirty-six percent of mothers in Phase 1 had achieved a high school education or less versus 48 percent of Phase 2 participants. The racial and ethnic characteristics of the moms were similar during both periods. However, more of the moms in Phase 2 focus groups were unemployed, 49 percent versus 41 percent in Phase 1. The portion of mothers who were married was similar in Phase 1 and Phase 2, 39 percent and 38 percent respectively; most mothers were between the ages of 18 and 34.

**Table 1: Locations of Focus Groups**

#### Phase 1

Round One (Dec 2007)	Round Two (May 2008)	Round Three* (July 2008)
Rochester, NY	Los Angeles, CA	Raleigh, NC
Baltimore, MD	Chicago, IL	Tampa, FL
Dallas, TX	Birmingham, AL	San Antonio, TX

\* Round 3 included the testing of division of feeding responsibility messages with mothers of preschool-age children only.

#### Phase 2

Round One (Dec. 2010)	Round Two (May 2011)
Birmingham, AL	Baltimore, MD
Dallas, TX	Raleigh, NC
Chicago, IL	Phoenix, AZ

There were slightly more girls than boys in the focus groups. In Phase 1, 69 percent of the kids were either Black and Hispanic/Latino,

compared to 76 percent in Phase 2. See Table 2 for more demographic information about Phase 1 and Phase 2 focus group participants.

**Table 2: Demographic Information of Focus Group Participants**

<b>Mothers</b>	<b>Phase 1</b> n=140	<b>Phase 2</b> n=176	<b>Total</b> n=316	<b>Children</b>	<b>Phase 1</b> n=73	<b>Phase 2</b> n=73	<b>Total</b> n=146
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>				<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>			
Black or African American	61	80	141	Black or African American	34	26	60
White or Caucasian	44	33	77	White or Caucasian	22	17	39
Hispanic or Latina	33	61	94	Hispanic or Latino	16	29	45
Other	2	2	4	Other	1	1	2
<b>Age</b>				<b>Gender</b>			
18-34	83	129	212	Boys	35	33	68
35-50	57	47	104	Girls	38	40	78
<b>Marital Status</b>				<b>Age</b>			
Single	57	83	140	8-year-olds	18	18	36
Married	54	67	121	9-year-olds	30	25	55
Separated or Divorced	29	26	55	10-year-olds	25	30	55
<b>Level of Formal Education</b>				<b>Grade in School</b>			
High School or Less	50	84	134	First grade	1	-	1
Some College	75	87	162	Second grade	4	14	18
College Graduate	15	5	20	Third grade	29	16	45
<b>Employment</b>				Fourth grade			
Not Employed	57	86	143	Fifth grade	23	26	49
Employed Part Time	31	38	69	Fifth grade			
Employed Full Time	52	52	104	16 17 33			
<b>Participation in WIC, Free/Reduced Lunch, or SNAP/Food Stamps (at least one)</b>				<b>Participation in WIC, Free/or Reduced Lunch, SNAP/Food Stamps (at least one)</b>			
Yes	90	154	244	Yes	50	58	108
No	50	22	72	No	23	15	38

Note: n indicates number of participants  
WIC-Special Supplement Nutrition Program  
For Women, Infants and Children

SNAP-Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

## Phase 1: Overview of Research Findings

In our focus groups, mothers consistently described their lives as busy and hectic. This influenced their preference for messages and the likelihood that they would attempt the suggested behavior. Moms preferred messages and supporting content that were practical and would fit into their busy schedules. For instance, moms found messages that encouraged them to offer fruits and vegetables at every meal to be unrealistic since their children were not with them at every meal. Moms were also less receptive to tips and activities that they felt would be too time-consuming or require a lot of cleanup. Draft messages that had game-like associations (e.g., “follow the leader” or “make grocery shopping a fun adventure”) received mixed responses from moms. For some mothers, these messages implied that kids would be running all over the store.

Messages that appealed to moms tapped into their desires to teach their children new skills and to help their children have a better future. Moms also preferred tips with an activity that would help their children learn, have greater self-esteem, or simply make them happy.

Our research also showed that many moms of both preschool- and elementary school-age children considered canned and frozen fruits and vegetables to be less healthful (e.g., canned vegetables were too high in sodium, canned fruit had too much sugar) than fresh. This influenced moms’ receptiveness to tips and messages suggesting these forms of produce. Moms disliked tips that referenced using canned or frozen fruits and veggies. Many moms reported running out of fresh fruits and vegetables between shopping trips. Based on these findings, additional information on the benefits of frozen and canned fruits and vegetables, particularly when fresh is not available, was added to the supporting content.



### *Role Modeling*

- 1:** They learn from watching you. Eat fruits and veggies and your kids will too.
- 2:** They take their lead from you. Eat fruits and veggies and your kids will too.

Testing included related photos for messages and support content (tips, advice, and guidance). Across all groups, mothers generally did not spontaneously react to the pictures. When prompted for feedback about the images, most mothers appreciated the expressions on the children’s faces and photos of happy kids. The figures in the following sections show one of the photos tested with messages; however, all photos are in the appendixes.

## Discussions With Mothers of Preschool-Age Children

Focus group findings indicate that mothers consider themselves to be role models for their 2- to 5-year-olds and have observed their children copying or mimicking their behavior. Participants connected strongly with the role modeling messages “they learn by watching you” and “they take their lead from you,” noting that they were believable and conjured up strong mother/child images.

“...I think of things my parents used to do. I think those are things I should try to do—they [kids] take their lead from you. They’re very impressionable. Whatever you do, they do, too.”

-Mother of preschooler, Chicago, IL

Supporting content accompanying these messages includes a brief narrative by “a mom” (see Figure D), and bulleted tips. Mothers connected with phrases in the narrative and bulleted tips that expressed moms’ desires to teach their kids and help them have a healthy future.

Our findings indicate that these messages and the supporting content work because they help motivate moms to be good role models in a practical way that doesn’t make moms feel guilty.



### *Cooking and Eating Together*

**1:** Cook together. Eat together. Talk together. Make mealtime a family time.

**2:** Make meals and memories together. It’s a lesson they’ll use for life.



### **Figure D: Sample Narrative-Style Supporting Content on Role Modeling\***

“My 3-year-old picks up on so much. She loves to copy what I do. Sometimes she will ask for a food she saw me eat. And I didn’t even know she was watching me! So, I try to eat fruits and vegetables. That way she’ll want them too. My doctor told me that kids learn eating habits when they are young. I want my child to learn to eat fruits and vegetables so she’ll be healthy. It makes me feel good that I’m teaching her something she’ll use for life.”

\* See Appendix B for full supporting content related to role modeling.

Less than half of mothers of preschoolers reported eating together with their family on a regular basis. Some mothers ate breakfast or lunch with their children, but dinner was the meal most frequently eaten together.

Moms found the repetition of the word “together” and the use of “family time” in these messages compelling because they emphasized the shared aspects of mealtime.

“That’s how we grew up...sitting at the table, but now it’s different.”

-Mother of preschooler, Birmingham, AL

For some mothers, these messages reminded them of their own experiences of sharing family meals and learning healthy habits from their mothers and/or grandmothers.

Supporting content related to eating together (see Appendix B,) addresses issues, barriers, and motivators that emerged during testing. Moms who did not eat dinner with their children mentioned scheduling conflicts, differences in preferred eating times and locations (e.g., family members wanting to eat later or in the living room), and challenges associated with feeding their preschoolers while trying to eat their own meals. While mothers emphasized the importance of eating together as a family to talk and connect with each other, many reported watching television while eating together during mealtimes. Aspects of the supporting content that moms particularly liked were tips about focusing on each other at mealtimes and making meals a stress-free time. Moms also liked role modeling tips in this content, specifically the tip to “eat fruits and veggies and your kids will too” tip.

Our focus groups revealed that many moms did not currently involve their children in even the simplest food preparation activities, such as washing produce or adding ingredients.



**Figure E: Sample Bullet-Tip Style Supporting Content on Cooking Together\***

Teach your kids to create healthy meals. It’s a lesson they’ll use for life. Kids like to try foods they help make. It’s a great way to encourage your child to eat fruits and vegetables. They feel good about doing something “grown-up.”

*\* See Appendix B for full supporting content related to cooking and eating together.*

The core messages and supporting content appealed to moms because they emphasize the “teaching” and “learning” aspects of preparing foods together and the emotional benefits of such activities (see Figure E). Initially, many moms had difficulty envisioning “cooking” activities that 2- to 5-year-olds could do safely. The supporting content provides moms with age-appropriate cooking activities for 2- to 5-year-olds. Moms felt that these activities were not too time-consuming or too messy. Including hands-on activities for kids during nutrition education classes may help to increase mother’s confidence in involving kids in preparing foods.

### ***Messages on the Division of Feeding Responsibility.***

Many nutrition education materials that address the division of feeding responsibility use language stating that parents and caregivers are responsible for what, when, and where a child eats and that children are responsible for

how much and whether they eat.<sup>18</sup> We tested several variations of this idea, including: “How much your child eats may not look like enough, but it probably is. Offer a variety of healthy food choices and let your child decide how much to eat. They’ll eat what they need throughout the week.” The reaction from moms to these messages was strongly and consistently negative. Moms did not find these statements to be true, believable, or motivating.

“I can’t trust her when she says, ‘I’m all done,’ because it means... ‘I wanna go play.’”

-Mother of preschooler, Raleigh, NC

Based on these findings, we conducted additional focus group testing to better understand mothers’ thoughts, feelings, and practices regarding various tenets of the division of feeding responsibility. These focus groups revealed that low-income mothers did not believe that their children would or could make responsible choices on their own about what to eat and how much to eat. Moms felt that their children would say “I’m full” or “all done” to try to leave the table to avoid eating foods they do not like or to play, watch television, or do something they would rather be doing other than eating.

“Even though it’s a tiny little bit, well, you have to force them to eat. So if I just let them decide how much they’re going to eat, they won’t eat. But they’re going to be hiding behind me eating something else that they can find on their own.”

-Mother of preschooler, Dallas, TX

Interestingly, many moms felt that kids should not be made to “clean their plate,” yet moms openly stated that they would engage in a number of child feeding practices to get their children to eat “enough.” As such, messages related to not making kids eat everything on their plate may miss the mark because moms report not engaging in this particular behavior. However, they do use pressure and coercion to get their children to eat what they feel is “enough.”

The “moms provide, kids decide” concept was a very new and abstract idea for most mothers. The core messages on this topic help introduce this concept in specific ways and in areas where moms are more open to change. These messages are designed to motivate moms to let children decide how much to eat when introducing new foods and allow children to serve themselves. For these messages, we found that a short “hook” followed by three to four sentences of supporting text worked better than the brief messages used for the other concepts.



### ***Letting Children Serve Themselves***

**Let them learn by serving themselves.** Let your kids serve themselves at dinner. Teach them to take small amounts at first. Tell them they can get more if they’re still hungry.

Few mothers in our focus groups allowed their preschool-age children to serve themselves. Most mothers prepared their children's plates in the kitchen and then put them on the table, serving their children portions based upon what their kids typically eat. When presented alone as part of supporting content, moms reacted negatively to the idea of letting kids serve themselves, saying that it would be too messy, unsafe (i.e., hot foods), or that their kids just weren't capable of doing so.

However, when the message was presented in the context of allowing kids to "learn by serving themselves," we saw a dramatic transformation. Moms started talking excitedly about how they would try this at home, and they saw this as a way to help their children advance developmentally.

"One of the things that I've taken out of [this discussion] is teaching my son how to serve himself so that he can learn good portion sizes and learn to become more independent. He likes to do things on his own now, and serving himself would be another milestone in growing up."

-Mother of preschooler, Tampa, FL

The words "teach" and "learn" were key motivators in this message, with moms responding well to the idea of guiding their children toward independence. Moms liked the phrase "Tell them they can get more if they're still hungry" because it made them part of the process and emphasized one of their favorite roles—teacher. Also, the ideas of practice and taking small amounts limit the chance for mess and wasted food.



**Figure F: Sample of Supporting Content on Letting Kids Serve Themselves.**

Your kids will learn many useful life lessons when you let them serve themselves...They learn to make decisions about which foods and how much to put on their plates, they learn to be more aware of when they are hungry and when they are full....

\* See appendix B for full text.

Moms were especially responsive to the statement "Even your 3- to 5- year-old child can practice by serving from small bowls that you hold for them." For some mothers, this statement alleviated their concerns about children serving from a hot stove and provided a concrete and practical way that children could serve themselves. Photos demonstrating this method may help to convince mothers to try it as shown in Figure F.

In our early focus groups, mothers responded negatively to messages that implied that it could take up to 11 tries before a child likes a new food. Some moms thought this many repetitions suggested forcing a food on a child, while others suggested that the result was not worth the trouble. Instead of offering the same food to their children 11 times just to get them to eat it, they reasoned that there are other healthful options they can get their children to eat with less effort.



### *Trying New Foods*

**Sometimes new foods take time.** Kids don't always take to new foods right away. Offer new fruits and veggies many times. Give them a taste at first and be patient with them.

**Patience works better than pressure.** Offer your children new foods. Then, let them choose how much to eat. Kids are more likely to enjoy a food when eating it is their own choice. It also helps them learn to be independent.

Moms were more open to messages that encouraged them to give their children many opportunities to have small tastes. The core nutrition message, “Sometimes new foods take time,” worked because it reflected reality. Moms agreed that it takes patience and persistence to get a child to eat a new food. Statements like this one confirmed they were doing the right thing and encouraged them to keep trying.

Mothers responded well to tips about encouraging and praising children when they try new foods. The tip that suggested offering new foods prepared in different ways was particularly well received.

The “Patience works better than pressure” message worked because it helped mothers feel like they are part of the learning process, even if it is something the children need to learn on their own.



### *Making Fruits and Vegetables Available and Accessible in the Home*

**1:** Want your kids to reach for a healthy snack? Make sure fruits and veggies are in reach.

**2:** When they come home hungry, have fruits and veggies ready to eat.

The supporting content included narratives written in the voice of a mother, as well as bulleted-style “how-to” information. Reactions suggest that mothers are interested in ideas on how to adopt DFR. The content increased many mothers’ interest in developing their children’s independence and lifelong skills beyond healthy eating.

### **Discussions With Mothers of Elementary School-Age Children**

Moms in our focus groups agreed that kids are more likely to eat foods that are visible and easy to reach. They particularly identified with the idea that kids are hungry when they get home from school and look for a snack. Supporting content includes a short narrative paragraph describing a mom’s experience in trying to get her child to eat fruits and vegetables, bulleted tips, and recipes (Appendix B).



“When I get something that’s eye level or in reach, he will pick that because he’s very independent. He likes to do it himself. If it’s right in front of him, that’s what he’s going to choose.”

-Mother of elementary school-age child, Los Angeles, CA

Moms related to the idea that kids enjoy dipping vegetables and fruits into things such as fat-free ranch dressing. Many particularly liked (and thought their children would enjoy) the idea of giving yogurt dips fun names like “Swamp Slime” for lime yogurt and “Pink Princess Dip” for strawberry yogurt (Figure G).

Some mothers were apprehensive about whether their children would like dips made with yogurt or sour cream, even though most moms were enthusiastic about using low-fat ranch dressing as a dip. Likewise, some moms didn’t know if their kids would like dips made with curry powder or avocado. Taste testing activities would help moms and children try out “new” recipes and increase the likelihood that they would prepare them at home.

The “produce picker” message engaged moms because they have seen the truth of the statement from their own experiences. For instance, one mom said, “If you let a kid pick something out, he’ll eat it.” Some respondents also pointed toward the emotional rewards “produce picking” gives their children, such as building their self-esteem.

“Let them do something big,” said one respondent. “They feel important, and they feel like they’re doing something good for me and for themselves.”

-Mother of elementary school-age child, Birmingham, AL

Some moms felt that it would be harder to engage their children in helping to pick out canned and frozen fruits and vegetables at the store because kids cannot touch and smell them. Creative ways to engage kids in selecting frozen and canned fruits and vegetables may be useful as an educational activity.



**Figure G: Sample Supporting Content on Availability/Accessibility**

**Dip-a-licious! Fruit Wands with Pink Princess Dip or “Swamp Slime.”** Put pieces of fruit on a toothpick, skewer, or straw. Cover with plastic wrap and store in the refrigerator until snack time. Serve with low-fat strawberry (Princess Dip) or lime yogurt (Swamp Slime) for dipping.

\* See appendix B for full text.

Our focus groups with moms and kids both indicated that few children consume milk at dinner. At home, milk was typically only offered at breakfast on cereal or, at times, with cookies as a snack. Many mothers felt that milk was no longer a priority now that their children were older. They noted that their children preferred other beverages or could get the calcium they need through cheese or other foods.

Now they're older, they have choices, and they do other things to get their calcium. My kids are big cheese and yogurt eaters. So if they're not drinking the milk, I don't really care...[because] they'll get it at school, 'cause that's all they have. But, other than that, they eat other choices."

-Mother of elementary school-age child, Chicago, IL



***Message on Providing Low-Fat or Fat-Free Milk at Meals***

They're still growing. Help your kids grow strong. Serve fat-free or low-fat milk at meals.

In the core message about milk, moms readily connected with the phrase "they're still growing," which is designed to reinforce the idea that milk continues to be important in children's diets as they grow. Moms found the message call to "help your kids grow strong" to be motivating, with some reflecting on how milk was valued when they were growing up.

"That's what I was raised on. Milk helps you grow strong."

-Mother of elementary school-age child, Birmingham, AL

The supporting content emphasizes that fat-free and low-fat milk have the "same nutrition with less fat" than whole milk (Figure H). Some mothers were unclear about the nutritional differences between the types of milk available. Findings also indicate that taste tests involving fat-free, low-fat, reduced-fat, and whole milk may be needed to bolster messages encouraging mothers to serve fat-free or low-fat milk. Finally, some mothers were not receptive to messages encouraging milk for the entire family at meals since they did not like/consume milk themselves.



**Figure H: Sample Supporting Content for Milk.**

**One Mom’s Story:**

**Fat-Free and Low-Fat (1%) Milk Are Healthier Than Whole Milk. Who Knew?**

Milk helps kids grow strong. So it’s important to me that my kids get the milk they need every day. I used to believe that fat-free and low-fat milk were not as healthy as whole milk. Then I learned that they have the same calcium, protein, vitamin D, and other nutrients, just less fat. The saturated fat in other milk increases the risk of heart disease.

*\* See appendix B for full supporting content related to milk.*

**Discussions With 8- to 10-Year-Old Children**

In our focus groups with 8- to 10-year-old children, kids preferred messages that melded fantasy/aspiration with the reality of being the “best you can be.” These results echo findings from other researchers, indicating that this age group is motivated by the ideas of having more energy, being strong or fast, and maximizing their physical performance at play or sports.

The five core nutrition messages for children utilize a rocket ship, super hero, and an “Eat smart to play hard” theme:



**Food Preferences, Beliefs, and Asking Behaviors**

- Eat smart to play hard. Drink milk at meals.
- Eat smart to play hard. Eat fruits and veggies at meals and snacks.
- Fuel up with milk at meals. And soar through your day like a rocket ship.
- Fuel up with fruits and veggies. And soar through your day like a rocket ship.
- Snack like a super hero. Power up with fruit and yogurt.

“If you eat smart...then you can play harder and be more active, and you can do more things because you have more energy.”

–Elementary school-age child, Chicago, IL

These fun themes can help you stimulate children’s curiosity in related educational games, challenges, and other activities designed to motivate kids to consume more fruits and vegetables and low-fat/fat-free milk or milk products.

“I like it ‘cause I actually want to soar, and I actually want to go to the moon and stuff, like an astronaut.”

–Elementary school-age child, Los Angeles, CA

Messages in which milk or fruits and vegetables were the reward for performing a requested behavior were not motivating to kids. For example, the message “Remind mom which veggies are your faves, then she will know to offer them at dinner” did not test well in our groups. Kids understood the benefit of “being healthy,” but it was not particularly motivating to them when presented as the only benefit.

To be consistent with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, the core nutrition messages for 8- to 10-year-olds need to be paired with images depicting fat-free or low-fat milk or yogurt, when milk or yogurt appears in the text of the message. In our focus groups, kids did not understand the terms “low-fat,” “fat-free,” “1%,” etc. Many could not identify milk products based on these categories.

## **Phase 2: Overview of Research Findings**

When asked which foods are important for children’s healthy growth and development, mothers in Phase 2 mentioned fruits and vegetables most often, followed by meat or protein and milk. They mentioned whole grains or whole-grain varieties of certain foods (e.g., whole-grain bread) less often. Discussions reinforced that for many mothers, knowledge is limited about why whole grain foods are healthy and/or important. Messages that described the health benefits of milk or whole grains were especially appealing to moms, particularly when the information was new to them.

Mothers said they struggle at mealtimes with getting their preschoolers to sit down to eat, to eat certain foods, or to eat overall. At the same time, they thought mealtime was quality time they could spend with their kids.

Kids (8- to 10-years-old) agreed that good health is important. Their top reasons for being healthy centered on not being overweight,

having energy, having strong bones, and not having health problems. These factors were similar to those revealed during the Phase 1 research.

Kids in the focus groups identified being physically active and eating fruits and vegetables as key things they could do to be healthy. Drinking milk, water, or juice was also mentioned, although no children suggested fat-free or low-fat milk.

## **Discussion With Moms of Preschoolers**

Building on the lessons learned in the earlier research, we segmented mothers by the extent to which they agreed (or not) with the statement, “It is important for preschool children to eat at every meal, even if they say they are not hungry.” Mothers who voiced any disagreement with the statement were termed “Amenable” to DFR. Those who were ambivalent or voiced soft agreement were identified as “Less Assured” to DFR.

We tested six new messages and supporting content with both groups. The goal was to help mothers understand the value of DFR, motivate them to try the behaviors, and implement the behaviors successfully. The tested messages included variations on the DFR concepts including:

*Moms choose what’s on the table. Let kids choose what’s on their plates.*

*Moms decide what foods. Kids decide how much.*

Across segments, the idea that children should choose how much to eat was met with significant skepticism. Although most mothers agree that their preschool children are able to sense when they are full, many do not agree that children at this age have the ability to decide when they have had enough to eat.

“You have to decide which things they can have more of. It’s not appropriate for them to decide how much to eat. She is not going to say, ‘I want more broccoli than pasta.’ ”

-Amenable Mother of Preschooler, Chicago, IL

Overall, our research showed that less assured mothers responded to messages that were emotionally appealing, while amendable mothers preferred those with actionable tips and guidance. The messages below address mothers’ concerns in ways that are both reassuring and practical.



### Division of Feeding Responsibility Messages

**Let go a little to gain a lot.** It’s natural for moms to worry about their preschoolers’ eating habits. Offer healthy foods and let your kids choose from them. They’ll be more likely to enjoy mealtime and eat enough, so everyone is happier. They learn to be independent.

Mothers who are more amenable to DFR found the message “Let go a little to gain a lot” appealing because it suggested they would gain immediate benefits. However, the age of the child was an important mediating factor. Moms

of younger children (ages 2-3) were reluctant to trust their child to be fully independent yet. Nonetheless, these moms were open to their kids learning how to be independent. Moms also found comfort and reassurance in the statement “It’s natural for moms to worry about their preschoolers’ eating habits.”

To help mothers further understand the benefits of DFR, the supporting content “One Mom’s Story: The Big Pay Off” provided reasons for using the DFR approach (e.g., it makes mealtimes more pleasant, helps kids become independent and learn to eat healthy now and for life). Mothers found these reasons both compelling and believable.



### Division of Feeding Responsibility Messages

**Think beyond a single meal.** Keep in mind what your child eats over time. Meals and healthy snacks give children several chances every day to eat a variety of foods. If your child eats only a little or nothing at one meal, don’t worry. He’ll make up for it with other meals and snacks to get what he needs for good health over time.

Overall, mothers expressed mixed opinions about letting their children choose whether to eat. Some mothers were open to the idea of letting children decide if they want to eat at each meal, especially when considering what their child has eaten over the course of a few

days. The message “Think beyond a single meal” resonated with amenable moms because it echoed current behaviors.

The supporting content for this message provided “Advice from a Nutritionist,” which mothers highly valued. Many thought nutritionists knew more than doctors on the subject of children’s eating because the topic of healthy eating is the nutritionist’s entire vocation. Many mothers also took particular notice and felt relieved to read that it is normal for children to sometimes not eat or to eat just one food.



### **Cooking and Eating Together Messages**

#### **Enjoy each other while enjoying family meals.**

Easygoing meals nourish the body and make stronger family connections. Keep things relaxed, and let your little ones select which foods to put on their plates and how much to eat from the healthy choices you provide.

Similar to Phase 1 findings, mothers associated mealtime with togetherness and family time. Mothers also saw mealtime as an opportunity for communication. The message “Enjoy each other while enjoying family mealtimes” addressed these motivating factors and resonated with moms across segments, especially “Less Assured” mothers.



**Figure I: Supporting Content on Cooking and Eating Together**

**Lead the Way: Creating a Relaxed Mealtime Experience.** In our home, we have two rules when it comes to mealtime: Eat as a family whenever we can, and keep it relaxed.

*\* See appendix B for full supporting content related to child feeding.*

Our research suggests that many moms often find mealtime “stressful.” Therefore, the idea of relaxed meals has wide appeal. Providing tips for how to create this environment was well received. In the supporting content “Lead the Way: Creating a Relaxed Mealtime Experience” (Figure I), the most important reminder of all was to remove distractions. In particular, many said that they needed reminders not to text during meals, as they find themselves busy with their cell phones and, as a result, sometimes inattentive during meals.



### **Division of Feeding Responsibility Messages**

#### **Feed their independent spirit at mealtimes.**

Each meal with your preschoolers is a chance to help them to grow to become more independent. Let them make their own food choices from the healthy foods you offer. Start early and you'll help them build healthy eating habits for life.

The mothers who were more amenable to DFR gravitated toward this message. These mothers heartily agreed that having choices—but within limits—makes children more independent. As in past research, several mothers were thinking ahead to kids eating at school when they thought about independence.

The supporting content “Feeding Kids’ Independence at Mealtime” provides many tips that moms saw as valuable—even those that prompted disagreement. Specifically, the idea of taking children grocery shopping was appreciated as a good way to involve them in food choices, but was also seen as a hassle by many mothers. Overall, many related to the desire to help foster their children’s independence and welcomed new and creative ways to do so. For example, a few mothers particularly liked images showing a mother with her child, helping to hold foods as children served themselves (Figure F).

Several messages did not resonate well with mothers. For example, some mothers praised the message “Moms choose what’s on the table. Let kids choose what’s on their plates,” but a few voiced hesitations about the practicality of offering solely healthy food at every meal.

The message “Moms decide what foods. Kids decide how much.” did not resonate with either group and elicited a particularly negative response from Less Assured mothers. The concept of children deciding how much food to take was contentious. The concern that children may continue to eat foods they enjoy even when they are full persisted.

Among the supporting content, mothers rejected material that included recipes they perceived as impractical, ideas that seemed too regimented or pressure filled, or suggestions they felt may potentially lead to wasted food.

### **Discussion About Fat-Free and Low-Fat (1%) Milk**

Consistent with our earlier research, we found that taste and the belief that whole milk contains more nutrients than lower fat varieties posed strong barriers to consumption of fat-free or low-fat milk. Many mothers believed that fat-free milk is watered down or diluted, and that something (other than fat) had been removed, leading to fewer nutrients.

“Skim milk is watered down. It isn’t as thick. It maybe doesn’t have as many nutrients.”

-Chicago, IL

While some participants cited whole milk’s fat content as its primary drawback, many also believed that their children need the fat—or that they are active enough to burn it off.

Many mothers reported that they drink the

same type of milk that they offer their children. However, many admitted to not drinking milk at all, and there was also a large portion who said they drink a different type of milk than their children, including lactose-free milk and soy milk. Overall, mothers typically consume milk considerably less often than their children. We tested message concepts that address these barriers and misconceptions, and specifically target mothers of preschool-age children or mothers of elementary school-age children. Some of the messages apply to both audiences. These audience-specific concepts address the mindsets of moms, tap into their emotions, and provide uniquely relevant information to motivate and inspire each group of moms to take action.



### **Milk Messages for Both Moms of Preschool-Age Children and Moms of Elementary School-Age Children**

**There's no power like Mom Power.** You are a positive influence in your children's lives. Help them develop healthy eating habits for life. Offer them fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk and yogurt at meals and snacks.

Message concepts that evoked feelings of empowerment and spoke to the influence mothers have on their children's long-term health resonated most strongly. These findings reinforced Phase 1 research that showed mothers' desires to help their children have healthy futures.

The "Mom Power" message resonated very strongly with both mothers of preschool-age children and elementary school children. They agreed with and appreciated the premise that they have a great deal of influence over their children's behavior and the habits they form. Most moms specifically pointed to the phrase, "developing healthy eating habits for life," as the reason they found this message convincing.

'Mom power,' 'positive influence'... and 'healthy eating habits for life,'... If you combine all of them, they all send a positive message.

– Mother of preschooler, Baltimore, MD

Moms found the supporting content for this message, "One Mom's Story: Using 'Mom Power' for good," relatable, informative, and helpful. Many also liked that it includes information about how they can increase their families' consumption of low-fat and fat-free milk and milk products. The two photos included in the content received positive feedback, particularly the one showing the little girl pouring milk (see appendix B).

The "Moms often ask (Q&A re: serving size/recommendations)" helped some mothers realize that their children were not consuming enough milk. Most mothers also liked the suggestion to "Offer foods made from milk – like low-fat or fat-free yogurt," a milk product many already consume and enjoy.





### **Milk Messages for Moms of Preschoolers**

**1: Strong bodies need strong bones.** Give your preschooler fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk or yogurt at meals and snacks. They're packed with vitamins, minerals, and protein for strong, healthy bones.

**2: Mom is a child's first teacher.** You teach by doing. Every time you drink fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk, or eat low-fat yogurt, you're giving your kids a lesson in how to eat for better health. It's a lesson they can use for all their lives.

Overall, mothers viewed milk as “very important” for their children’s health, especially for the development of strong bones. The message “Strong bodies need strong bones” reinforced these views, and mothers were particularly drawn to the brief, straight-forward description of the nutrients found in milk and milk products. Many also commented that the little girl making a muscle in the photo is both “cute” and very fitting for the content of the message.

“Mom is a child’s first teacher” resonated deeply with moms because it reinforced their sense of empowerment and influence over their children’s lifelong health and well-being. Most participants also particularly liked the accompanying photo of a young child looking up to her mother, which provided an appealing visual of a mother acting as a role model for her child (See appendix B).

Better health is the ultimate goal. . . You want them to live long, healthy lives. . .you would hope you instilled in them enough in a positive manner that they would stick with it.”

– Mother of preschooler, Baltimore, MD

The supporting content for these messages elucidates the health benefits of milk, emphasizes that fat-free and low-fat milk have the same nutrients as whole milk without the fat, and provides tips for switching to fat-free milk. Mothers found the content particularly enlightening and informative. They especially appreciated learning information they did not previously know. They also liked the simple tips for making the switch to lower-fat milk.

Mothers did not readily receive the message “At age 2, switch your kids to low-fat or fat-free milk.” They needed more information to accept the idea that children do not need the extra fat.

The message “Love and nourish them” did not resonate with mothers of preschoolers. The message suggested that offering low-fat or fat-free milk products is a way for mothers to express love for their children. Mothers felt that the statement disregarded everything else they do for their children.



### **Milk Message for Moms of Elementary School Kids**

**Milk matters.** Children of every age, and adults too, need the calcium, protein, and vitamin D found in milk for strong bones, teeth, and muscles. Serve fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk or yogurt at meals and snacks.

Mothers of elementary school children were particularly drawn to the message “Milk Matters.” They exhibited a strong appreciation for the health benefits described in this message. Mothers also thought the photo fit well with the message, particularly because it also features a glass of milk.

Many mothers expressed that they did not want milk to be the main drink at meals and snacks. Therefore, the messages “Make every sip count” and “Set the table with low-fat milk, and set the example” did not resonate for them. Furthermore, some did not find the latter message feasible since they do not set the table.

### **Discussion About Whole Grains**

Overall, mothers expressed and demonstrated significant confusion and lack of knowledge about whole-grain foods, their health benefits, and how to identify them.

[Whole grain is] brown and it's almost everything.”

-Mother of preschooler, Phoenix, AZ

The benefit mothers most frequently associated with whole grains was digestive health and regularity, but many struggled to name any other benefits. Most mothers reported that they buy at least some types of whole-grain foods, particularly breads, cereals, pasta, rice, and tortillas. Conversely, many who buy popcorn were not aware that it is a whole-grain food. While some mothers indicated that their children eat whole grains, mothers demonstrated confusion about how to correctly identify whole-grain foods. This suggests that they and their children are likely consuming far fewer whole grains than moms reported.

Mothers most often stated that they and/or their children do not like the taste of whole-grain foods. As a result, many feared that these foods (and, therefore, money) would be wasted because their families would not eat them.

Based on these findings, we tested message concepts designed to provide mothers with the information, skills, and motivation to increase their own and their children’s consumption of whole grains and offer them at family meals and snacks.

Mothers consistently reacted positively to messages and supporting content that provided information that was new to them, especially regarding the health benefits of whole grains. They also appreciated examples of whole-grain foods. All of the final messages and content reflect these findings, in addition to other qualities that mothers found appealing.



### **Whole Grains Messages for Both Mothers of Preschool and Elementary School-Age Kids**

#### **1: Give yourself and those you love the goodness of whole grains.**

Make at least half of the grains you eat whole grains – such as bread, tortillas, pasta, and cereals. Whole grains are good for your heart and digestion, and can help you maintain a healthy weight and good overall health.

#### **2: Whole grains make a difference.**

Whole grains help keep your heart healthy and are good for digestion and a healthy weight. Choose foods with “100% whole wheat” or “100% whole grains” on the label. Or check the ingredient list to see if the word “whole” is before the first ingredient listed (for example, whole wheat flour). If it is, it’s whole-grain.

Mothers described the message “Give yourself and those you love the goodness of whole grains” as positive, “showing a lot of love,” and “speaking to the heart.” Mothers also liked the accompanying photo, which showed a mother and daughter, but no whole grains. They felt the photo exemplified the theme of the message well. Photos that showed only whole grains and no people elicited polar reactions. Although some liked to see examples of whole-grain foods, many thought the foods shown looked unappetizing.

Mothers cited the message “Whole grains make a difference” as the most informative and straightforward of the messages and consistently ranked this message above all others.

“I think there are [health benefits from eating whole grains]. I just kind of go with the hype. I don’t really know what they are.”

-Mother of preschooler, Phoenix, AZ

Recent research suggests that consumers with a better understanding of the benefits of whole grains – as well as a better understanding of how to identify whole-grain foods – are more likely to consume more whole grains. The supporting content “How To Tell If It Is a Whole Grain?” and “Whole grains: How much is enough each day?” both proved to be enlightening and instructive. Mothers often said they wished to take this information home to post on their refrigerator.

In the narrative “Discovering the goodness of whole grains,” mothers were especially responsive to the “doctor’s advice” to “Switch to whole-grain versions of foods like bread, cereal, pasta, and crackers,” and they appreciated the how-to information.



### **Whole-Grains Messages for Mothers of Preschool-Age Children**

#### **1: Start them early with whole grains.**

It's easy to get your kids in the habit of eating and enjoying whole grains if you start when they are young. Whole grains give your kids B vitamins, minerals, and fiber to help them be strong and healthy.

**2: Happy Kids, Happy Tummies.** Serve your little ones whole-grain versions of their favorite bread, cereal, or pasta. It's a simple way to help them eat more whole grains. And, eating more whole grains that are higher in fiber can make potty time easier, too.

In the message “Start them early with whole grains,” the idea that introducing their children to whole grains when they are young will make the process easier when they are older rang true for most moms.

“For me, I think [starting early is] the best way you can enter the system for the first time because they don't know other flavors.”

– Mother of preschooler, Raleigh, NC

Many participants commented that “Happy Kids. Happy Tummies.” was “cute,” and they found the opening particularly “catchy.” The information that eating whole grains “can make potty time easier” was considered to be both important and personally relevant. The narrative “One Mom’s Story: Keeping my kids happy, healthy, and regular with whole grains” was well received for similar reasons.

Many mothers were interested in trying some of the ideas suggested in the supporting content “Fitting whole grains into your preschooler’s day.” In fact, some respondents found the ideas simple and questioned why they have not been doing some of these things already. Mothers often expressed particular interest in “Make a Healthy Pizza,” “Cereal Mixer,” and the general suggestion to “Offer Something Sweet.”



### **Whole Grains Messages for Mothers of Elementary School-Age Children**

#### **Start every day the whole-grain way.**

Help your kids get their day off to a healthy start. Serve whole-grain versions of cereal, bread, tortillas, or pancakes at breakfast. Whole grains give your kids B vitamins, minerals, and fiber to help them feel full longer so they stay alert to concentrate at school.

Mothers particularly liked the idea of helping their kids “get their day off to a healthy start,” and agreed that it is important to do so. As with the other messages, they also like the information about the nutrients and health benefits found in whole grains, as well as the examples of whole-grain foods to serve at breakfast.

Mothers rejected messages and content that suggested whole grains would provide children with more, long-lasting energy. Many mothers believed that their children had too much energy already.

In our focus groups, many mothers said they did not look at ingredient lists or nutrition labels. Consequently, mothers disliked messages with a call-to-action to read ingredient lists, including “Whole grains first,” which advised mothers to look for words like whole wheat, rolled oats, brown rice, and other whole-grain ingredients. The message “Whole grains—make sure you’re buying the real thing” evoked skepticism, as many moms likened the ingredient list to other label claims on packages. Furthermore, messages that described label-reading as a quick way to identify whole grains, including “Grab whole grains on the fly,” was not considered realistic or practical, especially by mothers who shop with their children and describe the experience as hectic and time-consuming.

## **Information Seeking Practices/ Preferences**

### **Discussions With Moms**

#### ***Internet Access/Usage/Technology***

We found a high use of computers among all mothers in our focus groups, and many also have smart phones. Indeed, all of the mothers reported having regular computer and Internet access. The primary point of access varied with their lifestyle. Those with office jobs reported that 80 to 90 percent of their online time was at

work, while stay-at-home moms with children or who worked from home spent almost all their computer time at home.

Mothers also reported going online for health information. For example, they looked up health questions and then weighed the information from a variety of sites before reaching a conclusion.

While few mothers indicated that they actively search for nutrition education, they exhibited a high level of interest in the supporting content. Some said they had seen similar information through recipe, cooking, or dieting Web sites, cooking shows, parenting Web sites or magazines, their pediatricians’ offices, or through materials from their children’s schools.

Mothers reported they would prefer—or be likely—to see nutrition information on Facebook, online resources/Web sites, email or e-newsletters, and online or television news. The types of information they reported preferring are meal preparation tips, recipes, parenting skills, and general and child-specific health information.

These findings underscored the need for communication tools that provide practical guidance, convey the benefits of adopting specific behaviors, and offer flexibility and variety to fit many lifestyles.

We tested three Web-based communication tool concepts designed to deliver information regarding whole grains, milk, and child feeding. The concepts included videos, rollover images, and widgets.



### Reactions to Communication Tools

The video was seen as the best delivery method for demonstrations, and many mothers said they would watch a video if it taught them how to make a healthy dish that their family would like. However, mothers also indicated that they did not have the time to watch an entire video, or would prefer to read the information at their own pace.

“I like it. I like the audio visual aspect of it, that it talks to you and gets your attention.”

- Mother of preschooler, Raleigh, NC

The **rollover image** was well received. Mothers felt it was not intrusive, and they liked that they could choose their level of involvement with the image. They also liked that it did not require them to click on anything, since they associated click-through with unwanted pop-up ads and links to other Web sites. Some even described the rollover as a scavenger hunt of sorts and said that the rollover feature made finding the information fun.

“The rollover is good, it’s a surprise, and it’s a little treat to me.”

- Mother of elementary school-age child, Phoenix, AZ

The **widget** was among the tools that mothers indicated would be most effective for delivering information to mothers on healthy eating habits. Mothers found it simple, effective, and informative. The mothers also liked that the information was easy to access and required very little time commitment on their part. One concern with the widget was its resemblance to a pop-up advertisement. Many mothers reported that they avoid clicking anything that appears on the side or top of Web pages, and most cited negative experiences with spam and viruses. Another concern was that the information was not printable or something they could save for later reference.



“In the past, when I clicked on something I got 50 different spam emails. I wouldn’t click on it, even in my trusted Web site.”

- Mother of elementary school-age child, Raleigh, NC

Based on these findings, we developed rollover widgets that combined the features moms liked about the rollover and the widget (i.e., including multiple images of happy kids without the need to click). In addition, we created videos. The content of the rollover widget and videos came directly from the core messages and supporting content for milk, whole grains, and child feeding.

### Discussions With Children

The focus groups with kids provide insights to aid in the development of supporting materials and tools for 8- to 10-year-old children. We tested interactive activity sheets containing content that motivated and assisted kids in implementing the behaviors addressed in the messages. In addition, we tested online game concepts that would engage the kids while improving their knowledge, skills, and motivation to consume whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and low-fat (1% or less fat) milk products.



### Activity Sheets

The most successful content in the activity sheets featured fun, interactive components that drew children into the content. Children were also drawn to recipe or snack suggestions, pictures of foods they like, or activities that could be shared (e.g., jokes). For example, the activity sheet “Eat smart to play hard” featured a layered fruit/yogurt recipe and the “Trying Game.” The recipe was appealing to many kids, and was generally seen as likely to be tasty. Many kids said that they would indeed try the “Trying Game.” Importantly, the inclusion of “something to do”—and not too much writing required—was an important draw.

“Each page should have some game on it.”

– Elementary school age child, Birmingham, AL

Children responded negatively to activity sheets that they perceived as too difficult or required too much reading, appeared “babyish” or out-dated, or included images of foods they dislike. The finalized activity sheets feature fun, interactive activities that attract kids and strike a balance when it comes to delivering too little or too much information.

### Computer Access/Games Kids Play

All children said they have access to a computer and the Internet—typically at home, school, or both.

For learning, math-related Web sites were top of mind. Specific Web sites children said they visited included Multiplication.com, MathPlayground, CoolMathGames, and other more general sites like StudyIsland and FunBrain. A few mentioned their school or school district’s Web site as well. Kids also reported using computer games, especially those ‘approved’ by their parents and schools.

### ***Be the DJ and Field Day Fuel Up Challenge.***

Research indicates that when communicating with children, interactive tools are often most successful, and there is growing evidence of the effectiveness of games. We tested two nutrition game concepts designed to inspire kids to eat more fruits and veggies, low-fat milk products, and whole grains. Both concepts included suggestions such as “jump up and down 5 times” to get kids moving.



Be the DJ



Track and Field Fuel Up Challenge

In *Be the DJ*, players mix in different sounds and beats (represented by images of healthy foods) to accompany the rap. The game concludes with a message reflecting how the “crowd” liked the player’s music mix (e.g., “That was milky-smooth”).

Children said they liked *Be the DJ* because they like music. Participants also thought that the rap song in the game would be catchy and fun.

In *Field Day Fuel Up Challenge*, players compete in four different track and field events. For each event, they answer a question about healthy eating. The faster they answer correctly, the better their results. Players collect medals at the end of the game. Kids perceived it as the more challenging of the two games. Most of the children believed their teachers and parents would like this game concept the most. They also felt it was more like a track and field event instead of a field day.

“I liked it because if I answer questions right, I always feel good about myself, the Field Day Challenge just gave me that feeling. . . .”

- Elementary school age child, Phoenix, AZ

Both game concepts performed equally well in testing and were well accepted as games that are fun and educational. Based on these findings, its potential for use in the classroom, and associated costs, the Field Day Fuel Up Challenge was renamed “Track & Field Fuel Up Challenge” and is available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/multimedia/games/trackandfield/index.html>.





# V. Putting the Messages Into Practice

The core nutrition messages are designed for use in the Federal nutrition assistance programs and to reach and resonate with low-income mothers and 8- to 10-year-old children. The messages and their supporting content are tools that can enhance theory-based interventions that:

- Address the key behavioral outcomes listed in figure B,
- Use motivators and reinforcements that are personally relevant to the target audience,
- Employ multiple channels of communication,
- Actively engage the participant, and
- Provide multiple exposures to the messages.



Just Say Yes to Fruits and Vegetables, New York (SNAP-Ed), <http://www.jsyfruitveggies.org/>

This section of *Maximizing the Message* suggests ways you can integrate the messages and supporting content into ongoing nutrition education activities. We've also included strategies for incorporating the messages into communication channels that were identified through nutrition education research, focus group discussions with moms and kids, and feedback from program stakeholders.

## **Connecting the Messages to Programs**

The core nutrition messages support national nutrition education goals and policies such as the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, and other efforts to promote and provide healthier food choices through the nutrition assistance programs, such as SNAP, WIC and the Child Nutrition programs.

Nutrition education implemented through the nutrition assistance programs utilizes a variety of educational approaches, including facilitated/participatory group discussions, anticipatory guidance, motivational interviewing, “hands-on” classes, social marketing campaigns, Web-based approaches, etc. With a little planning, you can easily incorporate the core nutrition messages into these efforts. Think of the core nutrition messages as building blocks that can enhance and add new vitality to your nutrition education efforts targeting low-income mothers and 8- to 10-year-old children.

## Consider Cultural Relevance

When implementing the messages, consider cultural relevance and make adjustments as needed to make them appropriate for the population you serve. For instance, if a large portion of the population has religious beliefs or practices that preclude serving milk/milk products with certain foods at meals, supporting content can be modified to offer other approaches (e.g., serving milk at snack time instead of dinner). It will be important to test any modifications with the audience(s) to ensure they are clear and have the intended effect.

The core nutrition messages and supporting content were developed and tested with English-speaking Hispanic and non-Hispanic White and African American mothers and children. FNS has also translated, modified, and tested these resources with Spanish-speaking Mexican-American moms. The Spanish materials are available on the FNS Web site (<http://www.fns.usda.gov/core-nutrition>). FNS modified a few of the tips and strategies (such as recipe and menu ideas, examples of foods, etc.) to reflect some traditional foods. Photos used in the Spanish materials reflect Mexican-American and ethnic/racial groups that are generally a part of their communities. If you plan to use the messages and content with other racial/ethnic groups or in other languages, consider conducting additional formative research to ensure that the messages are relevant, understood, and motivating to your audience. For example, the core message that encourages moms to “Let your kids be produce pickers” tested very well with moms in our focus groups. This message was overwhelmingly preferred in six groups and did not receive any negative comments from moms. Still, if your target audience is primarily migrant farm workers, we suggest you get feedback from these moms before using this message with them.

## Incorporating the Messages Into Facilitated Group Discussions and Interactive Classes

You can use the core messages and related supporting content in a variety of group education settings. Here are six easy ways:



### 1. Host mom “support” groups at WIC clinics, childcare centers, libraries, and other places that low-income moms of preschoolers frequent in your community.

Facilitate discussions on message concepts such as role modeling, eating together as a family, cooking with preschool-age children, and letting kids serve themselves at meals. Consider using the mom’s story about role modeling fruit and vegetable consumption as a starting point for the discussion (Appendix B). Create a circle flyer (see example) or show the child-feeding video to facilitate discussion. Encourage moms to talk about things their children might learn at mealtimes. Hearing from other moms can empower and give less experienced moms confidence to put the behaviors into practice.

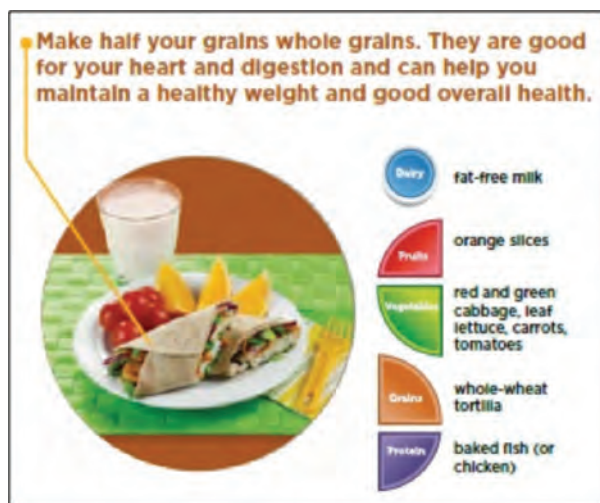


2. **Provide opportunities for moms and elementary school-age kids to be “produce pickers.”** Hold events at schools, faith-based institutions, community gardens, or grocery stores that allow moms and kids to select and taste different fruits and vegetables. Emphasize how letting kids select fruits and veggies may increase their willingness to eat them. Also, highlight how the activity may help kids build new skills (e.g., kids learn how to grocery shop, identify fruits and vegetables of different colors, etc.). Follow up on your event with “Fruit or Vegetable of the Month” activities that focus on a fruit or vegetable that is in season and affordable for low-income families in your community. Suggest fun ways to inspire kids to choose frozen and canned fruits and vegetables as well.
3. **Make your class dip-a-licious!** Prepare and allow mothers (and their elementary school-age kids, if possible) to sample the dip recipes included in the supporting content for mothers of elementary school-age children (Appendix B). A chance to see how easy recipes are to prepare and how good they taste will enhance skill building and increase the likelihood that moms will prepare these recipes at home. Include a discussion about how moms can make veggies and small containers of dip easy for their children to

“reach” for an afternoon snack. Giving the dip a fun name such as “swamp slime” or one related to the rocket ship or super hero theme can also help encourage kids to eat it (and the veggies that go with it). Invite moms to suggest fun names for the dips.

4. **Expand a “Loving Your Family: Feeding Their Future” class series.** Add a discussion about ways to make fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat milk accessible to elementary kids as after-school snacks. Encourage moms to set goals and have them share “success” stories during the next class. *Loving Your Family...* discussion guides are available at <http://snap.nal.usda.gov>.
5. **Encourage moms to keep milk on the table.** Facilitate discussions with moms of elementary school-age children on kids’ continued need for low-fat and fat-free milk and milk products. Specifically discuss serving low-fat or fat-free milk at dinner and limiting other beverage options. In our focus groups, few children drank milk at dinner. For those who did, milk was the only beverage option their parents provided. Hold a “milk taste challenge” to help overcome perceived taste barriers to consuming fat-free and low-fat milk. Provide parents with activity sheets for their children that are based on the core message for kids.
6. **Use the Track & Field Fuel Up Challenge Game with Serving Up MyPlate: A Yummy Curriculum.** These classroom materials teach kids about the importance of eating from all five food groups. The curriculum is available at <http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/servingupmyplate.htm>.

For the Snack of Champions activity in Level 2, Lesson 2, kids learn how to create healthy snack recipes for athletes. After completing the activity, kids can test their knowledge by playing the Track & Field Fuel Up Challenge Game. It will also reinforce what they learned about choosing healthy foods for energy, strength, and performance. Visit <http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/> for more examples of ways Team Nutrition has used the messages in its materials (Dig In at Home, MyPlate At Home, Garden Detective News, and others).



MyPlate at home, Team Nutrition, USDA

### Using the Messages in Counseling Sessions

**Motivational Interviewing.** Motivational interviewing is a counseling method that you can use to influence a mom's motivation to change her behavior.<sup>60</sup> Use the focus group findings presented in this guide to help you understand some of the challenges moms face when trying to change behaviors related to child feeding practices. This may help you in developing open-ended questions that identify personal challenges experienced by moms. It can also help you connect with moms during your counseling sessions. You can also use the core messages and supporting content as a reference on which to base feedback and choices for moms who are interested in ways to overcome child feeding problems.

For instance, if a mom expresses a desire for ways to help her child eat more fruits and vegetables, you could ask her permission to share some of the strategies provided in the supporting content on role modeling. For more information on motivational interviewing, see the WIC Learning Online module on Motivational Interviewing under the Counseling Skills at [http://www.nal.usda.gov/wicworks/WIC\\_Learning\\_Online/index.html](http://www.nal.usda.gov/wicworks/WIC_Learning_Online/index.html).

**Anticipatory Guidance.** Anticipatory guidance can help moms prepare for expected physical, social, and behavioral changes during their children's current and approaching age of development.<sup>61</sup> You can use the core messages and supporting content to create tip sheets to help mothers identify ways to help their children develop healthy eating habits (see sample tip sheets that use the messages on the Especially For Moms page at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/core-nutrition>). The messages address several hallmarks of preschoolers' development, including their reluctance to try new foods, desire to "do it on their own," and development of motor skills. Work with moms to identify strategies and set goals for eating family meals together; introducing new foods; and eating fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat milk.

**Counseling on Food Benefits.** When discussing changes to the WIC food package or school meals, share how low-fat milk has the "same nutrition but less fat" than whole milk, and remind moms of the key nutrients in milk. In our focus groups, most moms did not understand the differences among fat-free, low-fat, reduced-fat, or whole milk (other than perceived taste differences), nor did they know that milk has nine key nutrients. Many moms believed that lower fat milk was less nutritious and could only identify one or two nutrients in milk (generally calcium and vitamin D).

Moms were also receptive to and motivated by information on the health benefits of whole grains and easy ways to include them in meals and snacks. The messages and supporting materials explain these benefits in ways mothers find relevant and motivating.

### Enhancing or Creating a Social Marketing Campaign Featuring the Core Messages

Social marketing involves the selection of a narrowly defined target audience and involving them in the formative stages of your campaign. You can use the findings from the focus group research and the resulting messages and supporting content to:

- Refresh current fruit, vegetable, whole-grain, or low fat milk/milk product promotion campaigns by incorporating core nutrition messages.
- Create a new social marketing campaign around one or more of the messages and use the related supporting content found in the Appendixes. Collaborate with colleagues in other nutrition programs and/or partners to get even better results.

### Collaborating With Others To Maximize Message Impact

Collaborating with others in your community to promote the core messages can increase message exposure. This includes working with

other nutrition education providers serving low-income mothers or kids, such as the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP). Other intermediaries, or third parties, that have connections to the same target audience can also be valuable partners. Consider collaborating with:

- Coordinators and volunteers of food banks and pantries and soup kitchens
- Pediatricians
- Teachers, principals, nurses, foodservice staff, and school wellness councils that work with schools where many kids receive free or reduced-priced lunches
- Coordinators of afterschool programs serving low-income children
- Childcare providers and Head Start teachers
- Religious leaders and members of faith-based institutions working with low-income neighborhoods
- Managers of grocery stores and farmers' markets where SNAP and WIC participants shop
- Community garden coordinators
- Grantees and coordinators of programs that are funded to implement environmental changes that make it easier for mothers and children to make healthy food choices



Michigan Nutrition Network (SNAP)

Collaborating with others can increase access to the target audience, create synergy, and expand the credibility of your activities. These core nutrition messages are an opportunity to work with existing partners and to engage new ones.

- Share the messages with potential partners; explain their purpose, audience, and potential uses.
- Provide details on how you will use the messages and content in the community and offer suggestions on how you can work together.
- Share the benefits of collaboration and offer specific ways organizations and individuals can participate as full partners or as supporters, such as:
  - Featuring articles that communicate the messages in community newsletters;
  - Including messages in educational activities for children and parents;
  - Adding messages and related content to a Web site and/or linking to the State or national Web site with information about messages; and
  - Disseminating materials conveying the messages at events.
- Conduct a seminar or training for intermediaries to acquaint them with the messages. After the presentation, discuss the messages and supporting content in small groups and brainstorm ideas for using the messages, including opportunities and barriers. Have the entire group rate and rank ideas and form a workgroup to outline ways to implement the top-ranked idea.

# VI. Picking Your Communication Outlets and Methods

Research indicates that using multiple delivery points, as well as a variety of communication tools and approaches to disseminate consistent messages to the individual, family, and community, increases the likelihood of success.<sup>62</sup> These methods increase the audience's exposure to the messages and the opportunity to engage them at critical decision points. Therefore, it is important to know where to reach moms and to understand communication methods that engage them. Ideally, selected channels should enable you to reach a high percentage of the target audiences repeatedly during a given period of time. Use of multiple channels also exposes mothers to messages using different methods in a variety of environments and at different times.

## **Learning About Your Audience/Community**

Audience research and community assessment can provide insights on how to reach low-income mothers, such as where they live, work, shop, get services, and spend free time; what nutrition programs they participate in; and how they like to receive information.

Federal nutrition assistance program data can provide valuable information, such as authorized WIC and SNAP stores with high average monthly benefit redemptions, program

sites serving large numbers of moms, schools with high percentages of kids receiving free meals, and childcare and after-school programs participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program. Nutrition assistance programs may also conduct consumer surveys to get feedback on services. These may be useful in your planning, providing information on things such as Internet access, shopping habits and preferences about ways to receive information. There may also be other State and local surveys conducted in your community that include useful data about low-income moms and kids.

National surveillance data may also be useful. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (<http://www.cdc.gov/brfss/>) provides State-specific data about health-related behaviors. The United States Census Bureau provides demographic data such as age, gender, household size, and language spoken at home (<http://www.census.gov/>).

Local nutrition educators are also valuable sources of information. They may know, or they can ask, where moms go for health information, the types of media they like, etc. Learn the primary sources of news and health information for moms (e.g., Web sites, newspapers, etc.).



Consider the types of transportation used. Could you reach moms with information in bus shelters and subway stations? Determine if their children participate in afterschool programs and, if so, where? These locations may be good sites for reaching kids and their moms.

National consumer marketing data sources can be helpful in learning more about how to reach moms and kids. For example, data show that mothers living in poverty consider professionals, family and friends, and the Internet as their top health information channels.<sup>63</sup> These moms also used social media, newspapers, and magazines as sources of health information.<sup>63</sup>

### Channels To Communicate the Messages

To support and reinforce nutrition education activities, educators use an assortment of materials, including consumer pamphlets, handouts, recipes, posters, activity sheets, school menus, newsletters, Web-based instruction, public service announcements and/or paid ads on television or radio, billboards, bus wraps, articles in community or religious bulletins, reinforcement items, and more.

Each approach and communication method has its benefits and constraints. Make sure that the resources fit the activities and channels you use and that the costs are both affordable and allowable. Use your knowledge of the population and what works with them to guide your decisions. Program funding and guidance vary and may affect which channels you can use to reach participants. Consider the guidance from your funding agency in making final decisions.

If you plan to develop new materials, consider working with other programs and stakeholders. Partners bring expertise and resources that can result in a more comprehensive effort reaching mothers, children, and the community in a way that is more likely to get results.

### Using Print Materials

Brochures, posters, handouts, and other print materials are commonly used to reinforce adult counseling and educational sessions. The use of narratives is also increasing as a motivational tool. Storytelling may support health behavior change, in part, through modeling, engagement, and normative beliefs.<sup>64</sup> Your choice of format will depend upon what you learned from moms about how they like to receive information, what has been effective in the past, and your budget. Consider adapting or modifying your existing nutrition education materials to include the core messages, especially if your materials already focus on one or more of the behaviors addressed by the core messages. Whether incorporating the core nutrition messages into existing communication activities or using them in new materials to support a campaign, it is important to communicate the information in a way that is consistent, accurate, easy to understand, appealing, and relevant to your audience. Test the material with the target audience and get input from intermediaries during development.



Virginia SNAP-ED

### **Ten Important Tips for Designing Print Materials for Moms:**

1. The core nutrition messages contain the “emotional hook” for moms. Feature a message with a compelling photo prominently (e.g., on the front of a brochure) to entice moms to read more. Include relevant information on how to achieve the goal and explain the “pay-off” for moms. For example, Virginia’s SNAP-Ed team developed calendars that coupled the messages with eye-catching photos and low-cost, easy, and tasty recipes to encourage more healthful eating among their clients (see above photo).
2. Include interactive elements in brochures and handouts, such as an area for mothers to record the goal they will strive to achieve or an assessment tool, such as the “Give It a Try” table included in the whole-grain material on “How to tell if it is a whole grain”).
3. Emphasize information with bolding, arrows, boxes, or circles instead of all capital letters.
4. Make your material easier to read by using short bulleted lists (as done with the supporting content included in Appendixes), short sentences, and a serif font.
5. Use left-justified and right-ragged margins.
6. Limit the amount of content provided. Focus on action-oriented tips and strategies that support the message and resonate best with moms.
7. Use attractive designs with similar color themes, fonts, and types of images (e.g., illustrations versus photographs, etc.) for a consistent look.
8. Use photographs or realistic line drawings that support the message and allow the target audience to “see themselves” practicing the behaviors. Images and photos play an important role in attracting consumers’ attention and “inviting” them

in to take a closer look. Test photos and graphics with your audience to make sure they are appropriate and motivational.

9. Keep cultural relevance in mind. Test materials with your target audience.
10. Include a source to contact for more information.

### **Using Print Materials To Reach Kids**

While many of the tips above apply to materials for kids, there are differences. Content needs to be sequential, developmentally appropriate, behaviorally focused, and interactive.<sup>55,65,66</sup>

Activity sheets, interactive stories, self-assessments, and other resources that get kids actively involved and allow them to practice simple cognitive and behavior skills are engaging and support behavior change. Making materials fun and challenging can also help capture kids’ attention and stimulate their motivation to learn.<sup>56-59</sup>

### **Seven Tips for Designing Print Materials for Elementary School-Age Children:**

1. Keep materials simple with direct messages.
2. Integrate the theme of the message (e.g., “Eat smart to play hard”) in the material design to capture kids’ attention and motivate them to learn.
3. Conduct formative research periodically to make sure messages and materials are still appealing to kids. What children perceive as “cool” changes over time.
4. Provide concrete ideas rather than abstract concepts (e.g., focus on specific foods to eat rather than nutrients).
5. Include a parental component. Provide either complementary take-home materials for moms or include activities that kids can do with their moms.
6. Use engaging pictures. In our focus groups, kids said that they wanted “action-oriented” images. For example, kids wanted images

of a super hero flying through the air or children playing a sport (“playing hard”) such as soccer or baseball.

7. Include interactive components such as puzzles, challenges, and games.

### Using Technology To Reach Moms and Kids

Many of the moms in our focus groups reported using the Internet as a primary source of information on nutrition and health. Among households with incomes below \$30,000, 62 percent of adults use the Internet.<sup>67</sup> Survey data show that 79.7 percent of all children age 3-17 live in a household with Internet use, and 50.2 percent of individuals with household annual incomes less than \$25,000 live in homes where the Internet is used.<sup>68</sup> Children who do not have Internet access at home may have it at school.<sup>69</sup> Overall, kids 9 to 11 years old now use computers and the Internet to play games, send e-mail, and even do homework.<sup>70</sup>

Increased access to the Internet makes it possible to reach more people more often with nutrition messages and related tips/advice. Some studies have shown that nutrition education delivered in a computer game format can significantly improve nutrition knowledge and dietary behavior among school-age children.<sup>71,56</sup> Depending on resources, the following online tools can be used to deliver core messages and tips/advice in interactive and engaging formats:

- **Reach moms through Web sites and e-mail.** Consider ways you are already using the Web to communicate with moms and kids. Are there areas where you can insert these messages? For example:
  - E-mails and other electronic communications can include short articles that convey a message and tips from the supporting content. (For examples, see “Training Material and Resources” on the core message Web page.)

- Use e-newsletters to provide moms with ideas for involving children in meal preparation using the related messages, or share a Dip-a-licious recipe as a “topic of the month.” Embed the milk, whole grains, and child-feeding rollover widgets onto your Web site to reinforce ongoing education activities (see appendix D for description).

- **Show videos on milk, whole grains, and child feeding in waiting rooms and group sessions** to introduce and reinforce discussions. Include the link to the videos on handouts for self-paced learning at home (see appendix D for description of videos).
- **Display messages digitally.** Use digital frames, computer monitors, message boards, and digital advertising displays to convey the core messages and related tips in waiting rooms, subway tunnels, cafeterias, and more.
- **Teach through play.** Kids can learn while having fun with the Track & Field Fuel Up Challenge. This online game engages kids while teaching them to make healthier food choices that include low-fat milk, fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. See description in appendix D. Include the link to the flash-based game on your Web site.
- **Use social media to draw moms to your online resources and key messages,** such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs and outlets that reach specific ethnic and racial groups. Examples of blogs, Twitter messages, and Facebook posts are on the Training and Resource page at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/core-nutrition>.

Formative research with your audience can tell you more about moms’ and kids’ use of technology and the factors associated with using it for message delivery (e.g., use of high-speed Internet access,<sup>72</sup> frequency of interruptions in service, etc.).

# VII. Evaluating Your Activities

The core nutrition messages and content have been developed as tools to help change certain behaviors among the target audiences. The developmental process involved **formative evaluation** procedures designed to capture information about the audience and input from them to formulate messages that resonate and motivate them to take action. As you implement these messages, it may be useful to get feedback from participating moms on the messages and your approach. If you develop new or adapt current activities to include the messages, conduct additional formative research with your target audiences. Likewise, evaluation is essential during subsequent stages (i.e., during implementation and at the end of the intervention) to document the effect and provide information to improve future efforts.

**Process Evaluation** is a useful tool for monitoring and can identify areas that require a mid-point adjustment. It includes such measures as tracking the number of people reached, number of times messages and materials reach the target audience(s), locations or places that moms and kids were exposed to the messages, the service provider involved, resources and training needed by educators, barriers and facilitators, etc. Process evaluation provides valuable information about

key elements of the projects that may help to explain the results of an impact evaluation.

**Outcome Evaluation** demonstrates changes that occur in the presence of an intervention but do not establish a cause-and-effect conclusion. It shows how well the program has met its communication objectives and potential ways to make it more effective.

**Impact Evaluation** indicates how effective the intervention was in changing the target population's attitudes, awareness, and/or behaviors. Although impact evaluation is highly valued, conducting this type of evaluation may be complex, time-consuming, and resource-intensive.

The type of evaluation will depend on funding, staff time and expertise, time available for the evaluation phase, etc. It is important to evaluate since the results can provide you with solid evidence to share with your colleagues and managers. Evaluation also helps quantify how your work affects low-income mothers and children and can help justify continued intervention.

When planning your intervention consider the following:

- What are your objectives?
- What evaluation approach/method should you use?

- What do you want to measure and what questions do you want to address? (Note: when deciding what to measure, think about what will be important to your organization's leaders and your overall program objectives. Consider asking partners, for instance, what they would consider as successful).
- What approach do you want to use to conduct the evaluation? How will you collect the data you are measuring? What is the scope and design? Will you build in a comparison group?
- What timeframe have you set for completing the evaluation? What plans do you have for using and disseminating the results?
- What resources do you have for the evaluation?

The following resources provide additional guidance for developing evaluation plans:

- Nutrition Education: Principles of Sound Impact Evaluation [www.fns.usda.gov/oane/menu/Published/NutritionEducation/Files/EvaluationPrinciples.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/menu/Published/NutritionEducation/Files/EvaluationPrinciples.pdf)
- Evaluating Social Marketing in Nutrition: A Resource Manual [www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/NutritionEducation/Files/evalman-2.PDF](http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/NutritionEducation/Files/evalman-2.PDF)
- The National Cancer Institute's *Pink Book—Making Health Communication Programs Work* provides examples of evaluations and related tools. To learn more visit [www.cancer.gov/pinkbook/page8](http://www.cancer.gov/pinkbook/page8).



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# Appendixes:

Appendix A: **Overview — Messages, Supporting Tips, and Advice**

Appendix B: **Messages and Supporting Content for Mothers**

- Fruits and Vegetables Messages and Supporting Content
- Milk Messages and Supporting Content
- Whole Grains Messages and Supporting Content
- Child Feeding Messages and Supporting Content

Appendix C: **Messages and Supporting Content for Kids Ages 8-10 Years Old**

Appendix D: **Online Communication Tools**

Appendix E: **Resources Using the Core Nutrition Messages**

# Appendix A:

## Overview of Core Nutrition Messages and Supporting Content

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service's (FNS) core nutrition messages are designed to help program educators “speak with one voice” by communicating consistent messages that align with the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGAs) and MyPlate. These messages use science-based approaches to help the target audience adopt healthy eating behaviors. The nutrition messages and related tips use evidence-based strategies that address barriers, improve skills, and increase self-efficacy for healthy eating. All of the materials, including the 29 messages, supporting tips and advice, photos, and sample communication tools, were tested with the target audience — low-income moms of 2-10 year olds and kids aged 8-10 years old. These resources focus on increasing consumption of low-fat milk (1% or less fat), whole grains, and fruits and vegetables among the target audience and promoting child feeding practices that foster healthy eating habits in young children.

The supporting content for each of the behaviors includes communication approaches that appeal to the audiences, such as:

- guidance in narrative, motivational mom-to-mom stories
- short bulleted lists of actionable tips
- questions and answers
- advice from trusted sources
- recipes
- interactive skill assessment tools
- fun, fantasy, challenges, and interactive activities to capture kids' attention

Both the messages and the supporting materials include the tested images. The photos and images help lure readers to the text, inspire them to read the information, and help them to visualize the benefits and see others implementing the behaviors. For information about the images, contact us at **NutritionMessages@fns.usda.gov**. These resources also reflect the tone, strategies, and language that resonated with mothers and kids during focus-group testing.

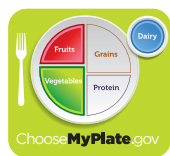
Nutritionists and other educators can use these messages to convey nutrition guidance on these topics in ways that moms comprehend and find relevant and motivating. For example, use the messages to help frame advice during educational and counseling sessions. Create new educational resources by combining a message with a few relevant tips or a moms' story to create attention-getting pamphlets, fact sheets, posters, bulletin boards, audiovisual and electronic tools, or digital presentations. Appendix D contains several tools FNS developed using some of the messages and supporting content, but there are many other ways you can use these resources to jump-start development of new resources for your audience. See the “Putting the Messages Into Practice” section of this guide for ideas on how to incorporate the messages and supporting content into your nutrition education activities and use them to inspire your audience. You can find additional ideas and samples of resources that States have developed using these messages in the Spotlight section at **<http://www.fns.usda.gov/core-nutrition>**.

# Appendix B:

## Messages and Supporting Content for Mothers

# Fruits and Vegetables Messages With Supporting Tips, Advice, and Guidance

Motivate mothers to make half their plates fruits and vegetables and help their kids do so too. Use the messages, tips, guidance, and photos to emphasize the importance of role modeling, keeping fruits and veggies accessible, and involving kids in food selection and preparation.



**Make half your plate  
fruits and vegetables.**

### Messages for Moms of Preschool Kids



**Let your kids be  
produce pickers.**  
Help them pick  
fruits and veggies



**They learn from  
watching you.**  
Eat fruits and  
veggies and your  
kids will too.

### Messages for Moms of Elementary School age Kids



**Want your kids to  
reach for a healthy  
snack?** Make sure  
fruits and veggies are  
in reach.



When they come home  
hungry, have fruits and  
veggies ready to eat.



**They take their lead  
from you.** Eat fruits  
and veggies and your  
kids will too.

## Supporting Content for Fruits and Vegetables

The tips, advice, and guidance provided below are shown with suggested messages. However, most of these materials can complement other fruits and vegetables messages as well. Use the approaches (stories, Q & A, and/or tips) that are most effective for your audience. See <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/corenutritionmessages/Files/Spotlight.pdf> for examples of materials and resources.

### Message:

They learn from watching you. Eat fruits and veggies and your kids will too.



### One Mom's Story:

My 3-year-old picks up on so much. She loves to copy what I do. Sometimes she will ask for a food she saw me eat. And I didn't even know she was watching me! So, I try to eat fruits and vegetables. That way she'll want them too. My doctor told me that kids learn eating habits when they are young. I want my child to learn to eat fruits and vegetables so she'll be healthy. It makes me feel good that I'm teaching her something she'll use for life.



### How can I help my child eat more fruits and vegetables?

- Eat together. Let your child see you enjoying fruits and vegetables at meals and snacks.
- Take it with you. Show your child how whole fruit is a great snack to eat at the park or in the shopping mall. Put apples, oranges, or bananas in your bag for quick snacks.
- Share the adventure. Try new fruits and vegetables together.
- Fix them together. Teach your child to tear lettuce or add veggie toppings to pizza.



### What kinds should we eat?

- Fresh, frozen, and canned fruits and vegetables are all smart choices. Buy some of each to last until your next shopping trip.
- Frozen vegetables have as many vitamins and minerals as fresh. Choose packages that contain vegetables — and nothing else — no added fat, salt, or sugars.
- Buy canned fruits that are packed in “100% juice” or water.
- Rinse canned beans and vegetables with cold water to make them lower in salt
- Look for canned vegetables that say “No added salt” on the front of the can. Buy them when they go on sale.
- Cooked vegetables or ripe fruits that are cut into small pieces are easy for your child to eat.



### Message:

Let your kids be produce pickers. Help them pick fruits and veggies at the store.

### Helpful Tips

#### Q. How can I get my child to help with choosing fruits and vegetables?

#### A. Try some of these ideas:

- Before going to the market, look over the store flyer together. Ask them to pick out which fruits and vegetables to buy.
- Use games about fruits and vegetables to get kids excited about selecting them at the store.
- For example: Challenge your child to see how many colors he or she can include in fruit and vegetable choices. Different colors contain different nutrients. A mix of colors gives them the different vitamins and minerals they need to stay healthy.
- Encourage your child to choose from various forms of fruits and vegetables – canned, frozen, and fresh. They all contain important vitamins and minerals. Plus, canned and frozen forms last longer. Buy canned veggies without added salt and canned fruits without added sugar or packed in 100% fruit juice.
- Ask your kids to pick a fruit or **vegetable** for a snack or **dessert**.





### **One Mom's Story:**

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#### **Eating a Rainbow**

I know kids need a variety of foods to stay healthy, and I recently learned that eating different colored fruits and vegetables provides a wider variety of the nutrients we need. So, as a fun activity, when I take my kids to the farmers' market or grocery store, I ask each of them to pick out a different colored fruit or vegetable. They're more likely to try something new when they choose it themselves. And the more colors they try, the more nutrients they're likely to get. That's the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow!

### **Message:**

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When they come home hungry, have fruits and veggies ready to eat.



### **One Mom's Story:**

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#### **Healthy Snacks for Hungry Kids**

"I'm hungry." That's the first thing my kids say when they come through the door. I need something to feed them—fast. Sometimes they go to the kitchen and get their own snacks. I found that when I put fruits and vegetables in a place where my kids can see them, they eat them. Now I keep cut-up veggies on a low shelf in the fridge and a bowl of fresh fruit on the counter. When I don't have fresh fruits and veggies, I use canned or frozen. It takes a little planning, but it's worth it. I know fruits and vegetables help them stay healthy.

#### **Keep Fruits and Veggies Where They're Easy To See**

- Keep a bowl of washed fresh fruits on the kitchen table.
- Put washed and cut fruits and vegetables on a shelf in your refrigerator where your child can see them.

#### **Make-Ahead Fruit and Veggie Snacks From the Fridge**

- Toss veggies with cooked pasta and fat-free Italian dressing.
- Slice apples. Dip them in pineapple or orange juice to keep them from turning brown. Store apples in plastic snack bags or covered bowls in the fridge.
- Kids love to dip fresh veggies in low-fat ranch dressing. Cut up veggies. Store them near the dip on a low shelf in the fridge.

## Message:

Want your kids to reach for a healthy snack? Make sure fruits and veggies are in reach.

## Easy Recipes Moms and Kids Love!



### Dip-a-licious!

#### Fruit Wands With Pink Princess Dip or “Swamp Slime”

Put pieces of fruit on a toothpick, skewer, or straw.

Cover with plastic wrap and store in the refrigerator until snack time.

Serve with low-fat strawberry (Princess Dip) or lime yogurt (Swamp Slime) for dipping.

### Happy Snack Packs

Fill small containers or snack bags with cut-up veggies.

Add a small container of fat-free ranch dressing for dipping.

Decorate the outside of the bags with stickers. Store in the refrigerator on a shelf where they are easy for your child to see.



### Dip Your Favorite Veggies in These Tasty Dips

(1 serving is 2 tablespoons of dip)

#### Honey-Mustard Dipping Sauce

1/4 cup fat-free plain yogurt

1/4 cup low-fat sour cream

2 teaspoons honey

2 teaspoons spicy brown mustard

Mix all ingredients together. Store in a covered container in the refrigerator.

Makes 4 servings.

#### Curry Dip

1 cup fat-free sour cream

1 cup fat-free plain yogurt

1 tablespoon curry powder

Mix all ingredients together. Store in a covered container in the refrigerator. Makes 16 servings.



#### Avocado Dip

2 medium ripe avocados

1 tablespoon lemon juice

1/4 cup salsa

1/8 teaspoon salt

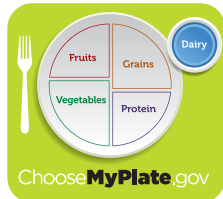
Peel and chop avocados. Toss avocado with lemon juice in small bowl. Add salsa and salt. Mash with a fork.

Cover and store in the refrigerator. Makes 12 servings.



# Milk Messages With Supporting Tips, Advice, and Guidance

Use the messages, tips, guidance, and photos to capture the attention of moms and motivate them to make the “switch to fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk” and other low-fat dairy foods and serve them as part of family meals and snacks.



**Switch to fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk.**

## Messages for Moms of Preschool Kids



**There's no power like Mom Power.** You are a positive influence in your children's lives. Help them develop healthy eating habits for life. Offer them fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk and yogurt at meals and snacks.

*Note: This message is also for mothers of elementary school aged kids, who also found it engaging and relevant.*



**Mom is a child's first teacher.** You teach by doing. Every time you drink fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk, or eat low-fat yogurt, you're giving your kids a lesson in how to eat for better health. It's a lesson they can use for all their lives.



**Strong bodies need strong bones.** Give your preschooler fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk or yogurt at meals and snacks. They're packed with vitamins, minerals, and protein for strong, healthy bones.

## Messages for Moms of Elementary School Kids

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**Milk Matters.** Children of every age, and adults too, need the calcium, protein, and vitamin D found in milk for strong bones, teeth, and muscles. Serve fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk or yogurt at meals and snacks.



**They're still growing.** Help your kids grow strong. Serve fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk at meals.

## Supporting Content for Milk Messages

The tips, advice, and guidance provided below are shown with suggested messages. However, most of these materials can complement other milk messages as well. Use the approaches (stories, Q & A and/or tips) that are most effective for your audience. See <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/corenutritionmessages/Files/WholeGrainsSpotlight.pdf> for examples of materials and resources.

### Message:

**There's no power like Mom power.** You are a positive influence in your children's lives. Help them develop healthy eating habits for life. Offer them fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk and yogurt at meals and snacks.



### One Mom's Story:

#### Using "Mom Power" for Good

As a mom, it's my job to make sure my family gets the foods they need every day – like milk. That's why I serve fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk to my kids. I also keep low-fat or fat-free yogurt and cheese in the house for healthy snacks. This helps my kids eat better, develop healthy habits, and grow strong.



When it comes to keeping it fun, here are some ideas that work for us:

- **Keep fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk in the refrigerator for snacks.** A frosty glass of milk tastes great and is an easy way to refuel kids after play.
- **Make it special:** On cold days, we enjoy hot milk with cinnamon and a touch of vanilla extract.
- **Prepare snacks and meals together:** Once a week, the kids and I make smoothies. We blend together low-fat (1%) milk, their favorite fruits or 100% fruit juice, and fat-free yogurt.
- **Mix milk, cheese, and yogurt with other foods.** I put plain fat-free yogurt on baked potatoes. It tastes like sour cream and my kids don't know the difference. When I make oatmeal, I use low-fat (1%) milk instead of water for great taste and nutrition. Occasionally, I sprinkle low-fat cheese on foods like chicken, whole-grain noodles, and vegetables.

**Message:**

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**Milk matters.** Children of every age, and adults too, need the calcium, protein, and vitamin D found in milk for strong bones, teeth, and muscles. Serve fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk or yogurt at meals and snacks.

**Moms often ask:**

**Q. How much milk does my family need each day?**

**A: The amount of milk we need each day depends on age.**

Younger kids need 2 cups, while older kids and adults need 3 cups. Here are daily recommendations by age:



<b>Age</b>	<b>Daily Amount Recommended</b>
Children ages 2-3	2 cups
Children ages 4-8	2 ½ cups
Kids ages 9-18	3 cups
Adults	3 cups

**Q. Do my kids get enough milk at school?**

**A: Probably not.** Most kids only get 1 cup (8 ounces) of low-fat milk as part of a school lunch. So, to get the recommended amount of milk each day, many kids need to have some at home, too.



**Q. How can I help my family get the milk they need each day?**

**A:** Try to make milk a part of the meals and snacks kids have at home. A cold glass of milk goes great with dinner, and after school or play. Offer foods made from milk – like low-fat or fat-free yogurt – as snacks and desserts. Eight ounces of yogurt is about the same as a cup of milk. You can also try small amounts of low-fat cheese as snacks. About 1½ - 2 ounces of most types of hard cheese is about the same as a cup of milk. Try cutting an 8-ounce block of cheese into eight equal, bite-sized pieces—each piece will be approximately 1 ounce. Plus, a block of cheese is usually less costly than pre-sliced cheese. If you buy sliced cheese, count each slice as about 1/3 cup of milk. Here are other ideas – check each one after you try it.

Give Them the Milk They Need Check the ones you tried	Tried it!
Use fat-free or low-fat milk (1% fat) instead of water to make oatmeal and hot cereal for breakfast.	
Serve fat-free or low-fat yogurt as a snack. Mix it up with fruit and nuts.	
Try a grilled cheese sandwich made with low-fat cheese for breakfast.	
Make a dip for fruits or vegetables from fat-free or low-fat yogurt.	
Try chocolate or butterscotch pudding made from fat-free or low-fat milk.	

**Message:**

Mom is a child’s first teacher. You teach by doing. Every time you drink fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk, or eat low-fat yogurt, you’re giving your kids a lesson in how to eat for better health. It’s a lesson they can use for all their lives. [Note: This content also works well with other core milk messages, including “Milk matters” and “There’s no power like Mom Power.”]

**Fat-Free and Low-Fat (1%) Milk Have Nutrients Everyone Needs**

Did you know that milk is loaded with vitamins, minerals, and protein, with nine key nutrients? Better yet, fat-free and low-fat (1%) milk still deliver this nutrition, just without the extra fat that is in whole and reduced-fat (2%) milk. But many kids are not getting enough milk to keep their bodies growing strong. Here’s what fat-free and low-fat milk and the nutrients they contain can do for your family:

Milk helps muscles move and refuels muscles after play.

Fat-free and low-fat (1%) milk are heart-healthy.

Protein and other nutrients in milk help kids grow and build muscles and other tissue.



Your kids and you need calcium and vitamin D for strong bones.

The calcium in milk helps keep teeth strong for a beautiful smile.

Milk is loaded with nutrients such as potassium and phosphorus that kids and adults need for good health.

Flex your Mom Power and serve fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk or yogurt to your family for a lifetime of healthy eating. Studies show that adults who drink milk are less likely to have heart disease, type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure.



### **Message:**

**Strong bodies need strong bones.** Give your preschooler fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk and yogurt at meals and snacks. They're packed with vitamins, calcium, and protein for strong, healthy bones.

### **Moms often ask:**

**Q: Does fat-free and low-fat (1%) milk deliver the same good nutrition as whole milk?**

**A: Yes.** Fat-free and low-fat (1%) milk contain the same vitamins and minerals, like calcium, potassium, magnesium, vitamin D, and others needed to keep the body growing strong and healthy.

**Q: Why should I switch from whole milk to fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk?**

**A:** Fat-free and low-fat (1%) milk are better for the health of you and your children. They deliver the same nutrients as other milk without the saturated fat. The saturated fat in other milk increases the risk of heart disease. Plus, fat-free and low-fat milk have fewer calories. And controlling calorie intake helps manage body weight.



**Q: My family has been drinking whole milk for years. How will I get them to switch to low-fat milk?**

**A:** Try these tips to help make the switch to low-fat milk easy for you and your family:

- Take it slow. If your young child or family is drinking whole milk, first change to reduced-fat (2%) milk for a few weeks, then switch to low-fat (1%) milk. Later, you can try fat-free milk.
- Try low-fat yogurt. If some family members don't like milk, try offering low-fat or fat-free yogurt.
- Try different forms of low-fat cheese. There are many kinds you can try. For example, start with low-fat cheddar – it's delicious melted on a whole-wheat bagel with a little jam.



### **Message:**

**They're still growing.** Help your kids grow strong. Serve fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk at meals.

### **Moms often ask:**

#### **Q. Why is it important for my elementary child to drink milk?**

**A.** Like children of all ages, elementary kids are still growing. So it's important they drink the recommended amount of fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk to grow healthy and strong. For kids ages 9-13, that's about 3 cups of milk each day. And fat-free and low-fat (1%) fat milk contains nine key nutrients like calcium, protein, and vitamin D, just without the extra saturated fat.

#### **Q. How do I increase the amount of milk my child gets?**

**A.** Here are some tips moms can use to get their kids to drink more fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk:

- Serve fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk with meals and snacks.
- Put fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk at eye level in the refrigerator, so kids are more likely to see and ask for a glass or to have it poured over whole-grain cereal.
- Add milk to some of your child's favorite foods, such as soups and oatmeal. For example, make creamy tomato soup instead of classic tomato soup by adding 1% low-fat milk.
- Occasionally, let your kids have some flavored fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk. Compare nutrition labels at the store and choose flavored milks with the least amount of sugar.
- Enjoy a glass of low-fat milk or yogurt with your child. Or, make a parfait together by layering low-fat yogurt, your favorite fruit, and unsalted nuts or cereal. There are many types of low-fat milk foods, so there is something for everyone to enjoy.





## Message:

**There's no power like Mom power.** You are a positive influence in your children's lives. Help them develop healthy eating habits for life. Offer them fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk and yogurt at meals and snacks.

[Note: This content also works well with other core milk messages, including "Milk matters" and "There's no power like Mom Power."]



### One Mom's Story:

#### Fat-free and Low-fat (1%) Milk Are Healthier Than Whole Milk. Who Knew?

Milk helps kids grow strong. So it's important to me that my kids get the milk they need every day. I used to believe that fat-free and low-fat milk were not as healthy as whole milk. Then I learned that they have the same calcium, protein, vitamin D, and other nutrients, just less fat. The saturated fat in other milk increases the risk of heart disease. So, my pediatrician told me that after age 2, kids don't need that fat. That's why I made the transition to low-fat (1%) milk. First I switched to 2% milk, then after a couple of weeks I switched to 1%. The kids didn't even notice.



### One Mom's Story:

#### Making the Switch to Fat-Free or Low-Fat (1%) Milk

My little girl is growing up so fast! She just had her second birthday. Last week, her doctor told me I should change her milk to fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk. He said that now that she is 2, the saturated fat in whole milk is no longer recommended, and that saturated fat increases the risk of heart disease. He explained that fat-free and low-fat milk have the same vitamins and minerals as whole milk – just without the fat. It's also the same milk she will get at school when she is older. Since everyone in my family is 2 or older now, I'm buying 1% fat milk for the whole family. I'll try fat-free milk after we get used to drinking low-fat milk. I like knowing that fat-free and low-fat milk can help keep our hearts healthy. It also feels good to know I'm helping my daughter learn a healthy habit.

## Message:

**Milk matters.** Children of every age, and adults too, need the calcium, protein, and vitamin D found in milk for strong bones, teeth, and muscles. Serve fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk or yogurt at meals and snacks.



### Fuel Their Day With Milk!

As a mom, I want to make sure my kids get the fuel they need to grow strong, stay healthy, and power their day. That's why I have fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk on hand. It gives everyone in our family the calcium, protein, and vitamin D we need, without the extra fat from whole milk. Sometimes they like to mix it up, so I keep low-fat milk products, like fat-free yogurt and low-fat cheese, in the fridge, too. I like to think of low-fat milk, cheese, and yogurt as healthy fuel for my family.

### Here are some ways we use it to fuel our day:

- **Keep it quick and easy**

- Pour fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk over whole-grain cereal. Or, melt a slice of low-fat mozzarella cheese on toasted whole-wheat bread for a quick and easy breakfast.
- Keep fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk in the refrigerator. A cold glass of milk is a tasty way to quench your kids' thirst after play or school. And milk is a healthy way to replace some of the fluids lost during the day.
- Pair their favorite fruit with low-fat cheese and whole-grain crackers for a quick and easy snack.

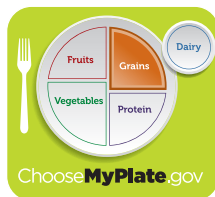
- **Make it fun**

- Put out different kinds of low-fat yogurt, fruit, and whole-grain cereal on the table. Let your kids get creative and make their own combination. They'll love the healthy snack they made all by themselves and sharing the recipe with their friends. Cut up and put their favorite fruit in a bowl.
- Add low-fat milk with a touch of vanilla extract. Then add whole-grain cereal on top for some crunch. Your kids will love this tasty and healthy snack.



# Whole Grains Messages With Supporting Tips, Advice, and Guidance

The following messages, tips, advice, and guidance address the confusion that many mothers revealed regarding the health benefits of whole grains, how to identify them, and ways to make them a part of meals and snacks their families enjoy. Use these resources to inspire mothers to make half their grains whole grains and increase their confidence in serving whole grains as a regular part of family meals and snacks.



**Make at least half of your grains whole.**

## Messages for Moms of Preschool Kids



**Happy Kids, Happy Tummies.** Serve your little ones whole-grain versions of their favorite bread, cereal, or pasta. It's a simple way to help them eat more whole grains. And, eating more whole grains that are higher in fiber can make potty time easier, too.



**Whole grains make a difference.**

Whole grains help keep your heart healthy and are good for digestion and a healthy weight. Choose foods with “100% whole wheat” or “100% whole grains” on the label. Or check the ingredient list to see if the word “whole” is before the first ingredient listed (for example, whole wheat flour). If it is, it’s whole-grain.

*[Note: This message is also for mothers of elementary school aged kids, who also found it engaging and relevant.]*



**Start them early with whole grains.** It's easy to get your kids in the habit of eating and enjoying whole grains if you start when they are young. Whole grains give your kids B vitamins, minerals, and fiber to help them be strong and healthy.

## Messages for Moms of Elementary School Kids



**Give yourself and those you love the goodness of whole grains. Make at least half of the grains** you eat whole grains – such as bread, tortillas, pasta, and cereals. Whole grains are good for your heart and digestion, and can help you maintain a healthy weight and good overall health.

*[Note: This message is also for mothers of preschool kids, who also found it engaging and relevant.]*



**Start every day the whole grain way.** Help your kids get their day off to a healthy start. Serve whole-grain versions of cereal, bread, tortillas, or pancakes at breakfast. Whole grains give your kids B vitamins, minerals, and fiber to help them feel full longer so they stay alert to concentrate at school.

## Supporting Content for Whole Grains

The tips, advice, and guidance provided below are shown with suggested messages. However, most of these materials can complement other whole grains messages as well. Select and use the approaches (stories, Q & A, and/or tips) that are most effective for your audience. See <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/corenutritionmessages/Files/Spotlight.pdf> for examples of materials and resources.

### Message:

Give yourself and those you love the goodness of whole grains. Make at least half of the grains you eat whole grains – such as bread, tortillas, pasta, and cereals. Whole grains are good for your heart and digestion, and can help you maintain a healthy weight and good overall health.



### How To Tell If It Is a Whole Grain?

Make sure you buy the real thing. It's worth it to know that your family will get the healthy goodness of whole grains. Because some foods that seem to be whole grains may not be, it's important to know what to look for. Here are some tips that work:

- **Choose foods that are naturally whole grains:** Some foods are always whole grains, like oatmeal, brown rice, wild rice, and popcorn.

- **Check the information on the package:** Buy bread, cereal, tortillas, and pasta with “100% Whole Grain” or “100% Whole Wheat” on the package.

Foods with the following words on the label are usually not 100% whole-grain products.

- 100% wheat
- Multi-grain
- Contains whole grain
- 7 grains
- Cracked wheat
- Made with whole grains
- Made with whole wheat
- Bran



- Check the ingredient list: Take a few seconds to see if the food is made from whole grains. Look for the word “whole” before the first ingredient. Some examples of whole-grain ingredients include:

- whole-grain barley
- whole-grain corn
- whole oats
- whole rye
- whole wheat
- wild rice
- brown rice
- buckwheat
- bulgur
- graham flour
- oatmeal
- quinoa
- rolled oats

Colors can be misleading. Foods like breads, pasta, rice, and tortillas that are dark in color may not be 100% whole-grain foods. And, some lighter color grain foods may be 100% whole-grain foods, such as “100% White Whole Wheat” bread. To make sure a food is a whole-grain food, check the ingredients using the tips.

Use this table to assess whether moms can identify whole grain foods!

<b>Give It a Try!</b> Can you tell which food is a whole grain food based on the ingredients? Look for the word “whole” before the first ingredient.	
	<b>A) Bread</b> Ingredients: Wheat Flour, Malted Barley Flour, Niacin, Iron, Riboflavin, Folic Acid
	<b>B) Tortilla</b> Ingredients: Whole Wheat Flour, Soybean Oil, Salt, Corn, Starch, Wheat Starch
	<b>C) Dry Cereal</b> Ingredients: Whole Corn Meal, Whole Grain Oats, Corn Starch, Canola Oil, Cinnamon, Brown Sugar
	<b>D) Cracker</b> Ingredients: Whole Grain Brown Rice Flour, Sesame Seeds, Potato Starch, Safflower Oil, Quinoa Seeds, Flax Seeds, Salt
	<b>E) Roll</b> Ingredients: Unbleached Enriched Wheat Flour, Sugar, Salt, Soybean Oil, Oat Bran, Yellow Corn Meal, Salt, Barley, Rye

Answer: b, c, and d are whole-grain foods because they list 'whole' grains.

## Message:

**Whole grains make a difference.** Whole grains help keep your heart healthy and are good for digestion and a healthy weight. Choose foods with “100% whole wheat” or “100% whole grains” on the label. Or check the ingredient list to see if the word “whole” is before the first ingredient listed (for example, whole-wheat flour). If it is, it’s whole-grain.

(Note: This content also works well with the message, “Give yourself and those you love the goodness of whole grains.”)

## Whole Grains and Your Family’s Health

Whole grains are rich sources of vitamins, minerals, fiber, and other nutrients that help keep your kids healthy and strong. Make sure your kids get the goodness of this “whole” nutrition every day. Here is just some of what whole grains can do for your kids:

Whole grains help fuel kids’ days by providing and helping them maintain energy.

The fiber in whole-grain foods keeps your kids feeling full longer, and that can help with a healthy body weight.



The minerals in whole grains help maintain normal muscles, nerves and a healthy immune system.

Whole grains have B vitamins for healthy red blood cells. They also help manage healthy blood glucose (sugar).

Whole grains are good for digestion and general health.

Adults benefit from whole grains, too. Eating whole-grain foods that are high in fiber can help protect against heart disease, reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes, support a healthy body weight, and is good for overall health. That’s the goodness of whole grains.

## Message:

### **Give yourself and those you love the goodness of whole grains.**

Make at least half of the grains you eat whole grains – such as bread, tortillas, pasta, and cereals. Whole grains are good for your heart and digestion, and can help you maintain a healthy weight and good overall health.

## **Whole Grains: How Much Is Enough Each Day?**

### **Q. How much whole grains should my family eat every day?**

**A:** In general, most family members need to eat about 6-8 ounces of grains daily, such as bread, cereal, rice, pasta, and tortillas. Younger kids (age 8 or less) need a little less – about 3-5 ounces. A good rule of thumb is that at least half of these grains should be whole grains. So, that's about 3 ounces of whole grains for adults each day, and 1 ½ to 2 ½ ounces for younger kids age 8 years or less. (Some active children may need more calories and therefore more grains.)



### **Q. What counts as an ounce of whole grains?**

**A:** Here are a few easy examples:

- 1 regular slice of whole-grain bread
- 1 cup dry ready-to-eat whole-grain cereal flakes
- ½ cup of cooked brown or wild rice, oatmeal, or whole-grain pasta
- 1 whole-grain tortilla (6" diameter)
- 1 pancake (5" diameter) made with whole-grain flour
- A small whole-grain muffin

### **Q. How can I fit the recommended amount of whole grains into my family's day?**

**A:** Here are some easy ways to include whole-grain foods in your meals throughout the day. Each food shows the amount and the number of ounces of whole grains it equals. Remember that children age 8 or less need a total of about 3-5 ounces of grains each day, so make half of these (about 1 ½ to 2 ½ ounces) whole grains!\* The total amount of grains adults and older kids need is about 6-8 ounces so they need about 3 – 3 ½ ounces of whole grains each day.



Ideas for Including Whole Grains at Every Meal			
Breakfast	Lunch	Snack	Dinner
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One cup of whole-wheat cereal flakes (1 ounce) with fat-free or low-fat milk</li> <li>• ½ cup cooked oatmeal (1 ounce) topped with a favorite fruit and a little sugar or honey</li> <li>• One regular slice of whole-grain toast (1 ounce) with a slice of low-fat cheese</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two regular slices of whole-wheat bread (2 ounces) as part of a sandwich (each regular slice of bread is one ounce)</li> <li>• One small whole-grain tortilla (1 ounce) sprinkled with low-fat cheese and veggies</li> <li>• 1/2 cup cooked brown rice (1 ounce) with stir fry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Five whole-grain crackers (1 ounce) with low-fat cheese and apple slices</li> <li>• Three cups of popped corn ** (1 ounce)</li> <li>• 1/2 cup of dry whole-grain cereal flakes (1/2 ounce) mixed into low-fat yogurt</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One cup of cooked brown or wild rice (2 ounces) with chili and beans</li> <li>• One cup of cooked whole-grain pasta (2 ounces) with tomato sauce</li> <li>• One small whole-grain dinner roll (1 ounce)</li> </ul>

(Some active children may need more calories and therefore more grains.)  
 \*\* Popped corn is a choking risk for children under 4 years old.

## Message:

**Start them early with whole grains.** It's easy to get your kids in the habit of eating and enjoying whole grains if you start when they are young. Whole grains give your kids B vitamins, minerals, and fiber to help them be strong and healthy.



### Fitting Whole Grains Into Your Preschooler's Day

Little ones, like adults, need to eat whole grains every day as part of an overall healthy diet. When you introduce whole-grain foods to children when they are young, it helps them learn to love them. And, it's easy to make whole-grain foods a part of tasty meals and snacks. Here are ways to fit whole grains into your preschooler's day:

#### Start the Day the Whole-Grain Way

- **Cereal Mixer** – Combine two or three of their favorite whole-grain cereals with different shapes. Talk about the shapes to help them learn to name them.
- **Oatmeal Topper** – Top it with a favorite fruit and spices. Wake and Make Burrito – Stuff a whole-grain tortilla with chopped veggies, scrambled eggs, and low-fat cheese.



#### Create Fun Snacks

- **Pre-Pack Your Snacks** – Pack a sandwich bag with a little whole-grain dry cereal for your kids to eat at the park, mall, or grocery store.
- **Crack Them Up** – Serve whole-grain crackers with soup or salads for lunch. Serve them with low-fat cheese and a slice of tomato on top for a quick snack.

#### Make Quick and Easy Meals With Whole Grains

- **Pick a Pita for Lunch** – Spread a whole-grain pita with low-fat cottage cheese and stuff it with chopped veggies. Warm and serve!
- **Make a Healthy Pizza** – Top a whole-grain tortilla or English muffin with fresh tomato slices, low-fat cheese, leftover chicken or other lean meat, and pizza spices. Heat and serve!
- **Pass the Pasta** – Try different shapes and colors of whole-wheat pasta. Sprinkle it with a little olive oil and low-fat cheese. Add chopped veggies and spices or tomato sauce for a quick lunch or dinner. Use whole-grain pasta for your macaroni and cheese recipes and other family favorites, too.

- **Peanut Butter and Banana On a Roll** – Spread 1 tablespoon of peanut butter on a slice of 100% whole-grain bread or whole-grain tortilla. Add ½ of a banana and roll it up. Your kids will love it.
- **Quick Quesadilla** – Place one slice of low-fat cheese on a whole-wheat tortilla. Add chopped onions, peppers, or other colorful veggies and microwave (45-60 seconds) until the cheese melts.
- **Sneak Attack** – Add oatmeal, cooked brown rice, whole corn meal, or whole-wheat bread crumbs to casseroles. You can also use ½ whole-wheat flour and ½ all-purpose flour when making pancakes or muffins.

### Offer Something Sweet

- **Make It a Whole-Grain Sundae** – Sprinkle crushed whole-grain cereal over a small scoop of frozen yogurt and top with berries or other fruits.
- **Try Sweet Toast** – Top a toasted piece of whole-grain bread with cinnamon, ½ teaspoon of sugar, and applesauce.

### Message:

**Happy kids. Happy tummies.** Serve your little ones whole-grain versions of their favorite bread, cereal, or pasta. It's a simple way to help them eat more whole grains. And, eating more whole grains that are higher in fiber can make potty time easier.



### One Mom's Story:

#### Keeping My Kids Happy, Healthy and Regular With Whole Grains

I used to think eating healthy was so hard. But, some of the best advice, like eating whole grains, is easier than I thought. Whole grains are good for digestion. And, because they have lots of fiber, they make potty time easier for my kids. I look at the ingredients and buy whole-grain crackers, bread, pasta, dry cereals, and tortillas with the word “whole” before the first ingredient. I get brown rice and oatmeal too, since they're naturally whole-grain and easy to find. Sure it might take me a few extra minutes at the store to make sure I'm buying whole grains, but it's worth it to see my kids happy, healthy, and regular.

## Message:

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Give yourself and those you love the goodness of whole grains. Make at least half of the grains you eat whole grains – such as bread, tortillas, pasta and cereals. Whole grains are good for your heart and digestion, and can help you maintain a healthy weight and good overall health.



## One Mom's Story:

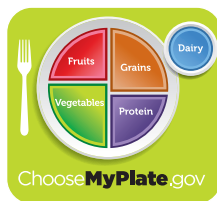
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### Discovering the Goodness of Whole Grains

When I asked my doctor what simple change I could make in my diet to improve my health, she said, "Switch to whole-grain versions of foods like bread, cereal, pasta, and crackers. Whole grains will help your family have a healthy heart and body weight and better digestion. They also can help reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes. That means better overall health for the whole family." So, I started thinking about the grains my family eats, especially the kids. I decided it was worth it to make a few small changes for our health. Now I'm buying oatmeal, brown rice, whole-grain cereals, and 100% whole-grain bread. To be honest, making the switch was easier than I thought. It took a little time, but now we are all enjoying the goodness of whole grains.

# Child Feeding Messages With Supporting Tips, Advice, and Guidance

Use these messages and actionable tips to increase mothers' skills, confidence, and motivation in fostering healthy eating patterns in their young children by modeling healthy eating, making family meals more enjoyable, supporting independent eating decisions, etc. These resources are designed for mothers of children ages 2-5 years old.



## Developing Healthy Eating Habits

### Messages for Moms of Preschool Kids



**Cook together.  
Eat together.  
Talk together.  
Make mealtime  
a family time.**



**Make meals  
and memories  
together.** It's a  
lesson they'll use  
for life!

**Enjoy each other while enjoying family meals.** Keep mealtime relaxed to nourish the body and help your family make stronger connections. Let your little ones select which foods to put on their plates and how much to eat from the healthy choices you provide.



## Division of Feeding Responsibility

**Let them learn by serving themselves.** Let your kids serve themselves at dinner. Teach them to take small amounts at first. Assure them they can get more if they're still hungry.



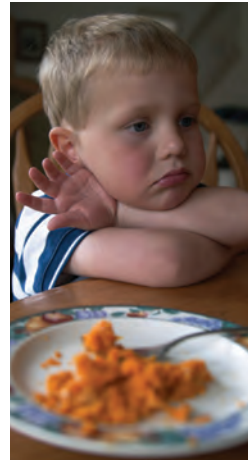
**Feed their independent spirit at meal times.** Each meal with your preschoolers is a chance to help them grow and learn to make some decisions on their own. Encourage them to make their own food choices from the healthy foods you offer. Start early and you'll help them build healthy eating habits for life.



**Sometimes new foods take time.** Kids don't always take to new foods right away. Offer new fruits and vegetables many times, served a variety of ways. Give your kids just a taste at first and be patient with them.



**Patience works better than pressure.** Offer your children new foods. Then, let them choose how much to eat. Kids are more likely to enjoy new foods when eating them is their own choice. It also teaches them how to be independent.



### Think beyond a single meal.

Keep in mind what your child eats over time. Meals and healthy snacks give children several chances every day to eat a variety of foods. If your child eats only a little or nothing at one meal, don't worry. He'll make up for it with other meals and snacks to get what he needs for good health over time



**Let go a little to gain a lot.** It's natural for moms to worry about their preschoolers' eating habits. Offer healthy foods and let your kids choose from them. They'll be more likely to enjoy mealtime and eat enough, so everyone is happier.



## Supporting Content for Child Feeding Messages

The tips, advice, and guidance provided below are shown with suggested messages. However, most of these materials can complement other child feeding messages as well. Use the approaches (stories, Q&A, and/or tips) that are most effective for your audience. See the “Spotlight” section at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/core-nutrition> for examples of materials and resources.



### Message:

Enjoy each other while enjoying family meals. Keep mealtime relaxed to nourish the body and help your family make stronger connections. Let your little ones select which foods to put on their plates and how much to eat from the healthy choices you provide.

### Lead the Way: Creating a Relaxed Mealtime Experience

In our home, we have two rules when it comes to mealtime: eat as a family whenever we can and keep it relaxed. Since we started eating together more often, our family is getting closer all the time. We talk, we laugh, and my little ones are choosing healthy foods. Plus, their table manners are improving! Here's what we do to make meals more relaxed around our home:

- **Remove distractions.** We turn off the television and computer, and avoid talking on the phone or texting, so our attention is on each other.
- **Talk to each other.** We focus our conversation on what we did during the day. We talk about what made us laugh or what we did for fun. For example, we ask, “What was the best part of your day today?”
- **Pass on traditions.** I tell the kids about the “good old days,” foods mom and grandma made that we loved to eat.
- **Let kids make choices.** We set a healthy table and let everyone, including the kids, make choices about what they want and how much to eat.
- **Let everyone help.** Kids learn by doing. So, the little one might get the napkins and older kids might help with fixing foods and clean-up.

## Message:

**Feed their independent spirit at mealtimes.** Each meal with your preschooler is a chance to help them grow and learn to make some decisions on their own. Encourage them to make their own food choices from the healthy foods you offer. Start early and you'll help them build healthy eating habits for life.



### Feeding Kids' Independence at Mealtime

Young children are fast learners, so it's a great time to help them develop healthy eating habits. Healthy eating means eating a variety of foods from all food groups. It also means eating fewer foods with added sugar, salt, and solid fat. With a little planning, you can give your child more opportunities to grow and learn to make healthy eating choices. Think of this as planning for everyone in your family. And remember, you don't have to do everything at once. Try adding one new idea at a time, then build from there.

### Helpful Tips:

- **Set a regular schedule for meal times.** Young children need routines to practice new skills, like trying healthy foods.
- **Keep healthy snacks available.** Place them in a drawer or on a shelf that young kids can reach. When you say it's OK, your kids can choose their own healthy snack.
- **Help your children feel more independent.** Let them pick from healthy food choices you offer. For example, they can choose between an apple or orange and a whole-wheat pita with salsa for a snack.
- **Make finger foods.** Prepare foods that kids can eat with their fingers, such as vegetable or fruit chunks. Kids love to dip, so serve finger foods with a dip like yogurt or dressing. Bite-sized pieces of foods (no larger than ½ inch) are easier for small kids to handle and help to avoid choking.
- **Make healthy eating fun.** Fun ideas get kids excited to try new fruits and vegetables. Make an open-face sandwich by laying a slice of low-fat cheese on whole-wheat bread. Add sliced tomatoes for eyes and a strip of bell pepper for a smile.
- **Eat with your children.** They are more likely to try new foods if they see you eating and enjoying them.
- **Take them shopping.** Ask your kids to pick a new fruit or vegetable that they want to try for dinner.
- **Involve the kids.** As your kids grow, let them help prepare, serve, and clean up after the meal. For example, kids can help by measuring, adding ingredients, stirring, washing veggies, etc. Kids learn by doing, and being involved helps them be more confident and develop motor skills.





## Message:

**Let go a little to gain a lot.** It's natural for moms to worry about their preschoolers' eating habits. Offer healthy foods and let your kids choose from them. They'll be more likely to enjoy mealtime and eat enough, so everyone is happier.



### One Mom's Story:

#### The Big Pay Off

The other day, I overheard my 4-year-old daughter telling her friends, "At dinner, my mom lets me pick the foods I want and then I put them on my plate!" She was so proud of herself, and I was, too. I recently learned that letting kids choose from healthy food options helps them develop good eating habits and become more independent. I was having problems getting her to try different foods, so I decided to try letting her pick what to eat. Now she says, "Let me take a little of that squash, too, Mommy." She also helps to plan and make dinner one night a week. She loves being Mommy's helper and does a great job, too!



### Q: Why should I let my kids make decisions about which foods and how much to eat?

**A:** Here are a few of the many reasons:

#### It helps moms:

- Make meal time more pleasant for everyone.
- Eliminate 'power struggles' and arguments about eating.

#### It helps kids:

- Gain confidence.
- Become more independent as they adjust to preschool.
- Sense when they are hungry and when they are full.
- Learn to eat healthy now and for life.

### Q: How can I help my kids form healthy eating habits and learn new skills?

**A:** Try these tips:

- Get them involved in preparing meals.
- Set a positive example. Offer the same foods to everyone.
- Set regular times for meals and snacks.

- Let kids pick what to eat and serve themselves from the meals you provide.
- Trust your kids to eat enough of the right foods over time.
- Slow down, relax, and enjoy each other's company at mealtime.



### Message:

**Think beyond a single meal. Keep in mind what your child eats over time.** Meals and healthy snacks give children several chances every day to eat a variety of foods. If your child eats only a little or nothing at one meal, don't worry. He'll make up for it with other meals and snacks to get what he needs for good health over time.

### Advice From a Nutritionist

As a nutritionist, I work with a lot of moms who are concerned about whether their child is getting enough of the right foods to grow and develop well. I tell them to look at what their child has eaten during the last couple of days, not just one meal. You see, kids' appetites vary. For any given meal, a young child might eat very little or nothing at all. And that's completely normal. It's also normal for children to go through a period where they'll only eat one food. Try to be patient and continue to offer healthy meals and snacks that include foods like low-fat (1%) milk, yogurt, lean meats, fruits, veggies, and whole-grain foods. That's how you can make sure that, over time, your little ones are getting the nutrients they need.



### One Mom's Story:

#### Enjoying Family Mealtime

We didn't always sit down as a family to eat our meals. But, a few months ago our family made the decision to enjoy mealtime by eating together. You wouldn't believe what this has done for our family. We're closer now than ever before. We talk. We listen. Our kids are getting better at talking to people and their manners are improving. We let the little ones serve themselves from the foods I provide and they're starting to make healthier food choices. It's simple. When our family eats a relaxed, healthy meal together, everyone benefits.



- We enjoy each other more.
- Kids serve themselves from the healthy choices we offer.
- As parents, we learn what our children like and dislike.
- Kids decide how much food to eat so they begin to learn the right portion size for their bodies.
- Kids learn to try new foods on their own because they weren't forced to eat them.



### **Try this:**

At family mealtime, have questions for everyone to answer, for example:

- What is your favorite food tonight? Where do you think this food was made/grown/raised?
- What new food did you try today? Where did you eat it? How did it taste?
- What was the best part of your day?

### **Message:**

**Sometimes new foods take time.** Kids don't always take to new foods right away. Offer new fruits and vegetables many times, served a variety of ways. Give your kids just a taste at first and be patient with them.

### **Help your child learn to love a variety of foods.**

Offer and encourage your kids to taste new foods. When they do, reward them with praise instead of treats.

### **Kids learn to like new foods by:**

- Having them offered over and over
- Having them served with familiar foods
- Seeing friends, older kids, and grown-ups eating these foods
- Tasting them prepared in different ways
- Choosing foods to try themselves
- Starting with small amounts



### **Offer a new food many times. Keep trying.**

Try offering new foods prepared in different ways. You can serve fruits and vegetables raw with a dip. You can also steam, roast, and bake vegetables — even some fruits. For example, try warming fruits like apples, pears, and peaches for about a minute or so for a softer texture. Try it with canned, frozen, or fresh fruit — just look for canned or frozen fruits without added sugar or packed in 100% fruit juice.

Many young children need to be offered a new food several times before they will try it and learn to like it. So, offer a small amount. If you keep offering a new food, eventually your kids will give it a try.



### Message:

**Patience works better than pressure.** Offer your children new foods. Then, let them choose how much to eat. Kids are more likely to enjoy new foods when eating them is their own choice. It also teaches them how to be independent.

### Moms often ask:

#### **Q. How do I know my kids are getting enough food and nutrition?**

**A.** Young children eat when they are hungry and usually stop when they are full. It's also helpful to know that before eating, their stomachs are about the size of their fist. So what may not look like much food to you may actually be just right for their small stomachs.

#### **Q. What can I do to help my children develop healthy eating habits?**

**A.** It can take patience, but try some of these tips. They've worked for many moms.

- 1. Offer young kids the same healthy foods the rest of the family is having.** Your child may not care for all that's offered, and that's okay. Kids eat better when they have the freedom to select what to eat from what you offer.
- 2. Try to set regular times for meals and snacks.** A daily routine of regular meal times and snack times promotes good eating habits. It helps kids learn there is always another chance for them to eat what they need.
- 3. Lay out a variety of healthy foods and then let kids serve themselves.** Children learn and gain confidence when they are allowed to make choices about what to eat. And remember, a serving size for young kids is smaller than for teens or an adult.
- 4. Listen to them when they say they are full. Young kids will eat the amount they need.** Toddlers have a strong sense of hunger, appetite, and fullness, so they are likely to stop eating when they are full rather than when the food is gone. And, children's appetite can vary — sometimes they won't eat much and other times they will want seconds.



### **Message:**

---

**Let them learn by serving themselves.** Let your kids serve themselves at dinner. Teach them to take small amounts at first. Assure them they can get more if they're still hungry.

**Your kids will learn many useful life lessons when you let them serve themselves at mealtime:**

- They learn to make decisions about which foods and how much to put on their plates.
- They learn to be more aware of when they are hungry and when they are full.
- They further develop their fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination.
- They learn to share, take turns, and be responsible for their choices.

**Try these tips to make serving themselves an even better experience.**

- Use small bowls so your kids can see the food, and use serving utensils they can hold easily in their little hands.
- Hold the serving bowls for them to make it easier to scoop up the food.
- Be patient! Your kids are learning, so be ready to wipe up a few spills.
- Encourage and praise your children when they serve themselves.

### **Message:**

---

Cook together. Eat together. Talk together. Make mealtime a family time.



**It takes a little work to bring everyone together for meals. But it's worth it and the whole family eats better.**

- Start eating meals together as a family when your kids are young. This way, it becomes a habit.
- Plan when you will eat together as a family. Write it on your calendar.
- You may not be able to eat together every day, but aim to have family meals at least four times a week.



### How to make family meals happy

- Focus on the meal and each other. Turn off the television. Take phone calls later.
- Talk about fun and happy things. Try to make meals a stress-free time.
- Encourage your child to try foods. But, don't lecture or force your child to eat.

### Fast family meals

- Cook it fast on busy nights. Try stir-fried meat and vegetables, quick soups, or sandwiches.
- Do some tasks the day before. Wash and cut vegetables or make a fruit salad. Cook lean ground beef or turkey for burritos or chili. Store everything in the fridge until ready to use.
- Find quick and tasty recipes that don't cost a lot to make at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/eatsmartplayhardhealthylifestyle/QuickandEasy/smartstartrecipes.htm>



### Talk to me!

- What made you feel really happy today?
- What did you have to eat at lunch today?
- What's your favorite veggie? Why?
- Tell me one thing you learned today.
- What made you laugh today?



### **Message:**

Make meals and memories together. It's a lesson they'll use for life.

**Teach your kids to create healthy meals. It's a lesson they'll use for life.** Kids like to try foods they help make. It's a great way to encourage your child to eat fruits and vegetables. They feel good about doing something "grown-up." Give them small jobs to do. Praise their efforts. Their smiles will light up your kitchen.

Kids love helping in the kitchen. Parents love knowing that their child is also learning skills they'll use for life. Help teach them to follow instructions, count, and more!



### **Prepare fruits and veggies together.**

Children learn about fruits and vegetables when they help make them. And all of that mixing, mashing, and measuring makes them want to taste what they are making. It's a great trick for helping your "picky eater" try fruits and vegetables.

On busy weeknights...Cooking together can mean more "mommy and me" time on busy days.

- Ask your child to help with easy tasks, like adding veggie toppings to a cheese pizza.
- Let your child choose which veggies to add to soup. Only an adult should heat and stir hot soup.
- Make sandwiches together.



### **Make some meals special.**

- Have a color contest and see how many green, red, yellow, and orange fruits and vegetables you can include in one meal.
- Name a food your child helps create. Make a big deal of serving "Karla's Salad" or "Corey's Sweet Potatoes" for dinner.
- Try a "Make Your Own" night. Let your family put together its own soft tacos, sandwiches, pizza, or salads.
- Place the ingredients within easy reach and let the fun begin.

**Cooking Together Activities by Age:**

2-year-olds	3-year-olds	4-5-year-olds
<p>Make “faces” out of pieces of fruits and vegetables.</p> <p>Scrub vegetables or fruits.</p> <p>Tear lettuce or greens.</p> <p>Snap green beans.</p> 	<p>Add ingredients.</p> <p>Stir.</p> <p>Spread peanut butter or other spreads.</p> <p>Shake a drink in a sealed container.</p> <p>Knead bread dough.</p> 	<p>Peel and mix some fruits and vegetables.</p> <p>Peel hard boiled eggs.</p> <p>Cut soft fruits with a plastic knife.</p> <p>Only adults should use sharp knives. Wipe off counters.</p> <p>Mash soft fruits, vegetables, and beans.</p> <p>Measure dry ingredients.</p> <p>Measure liquids with help.</p> 

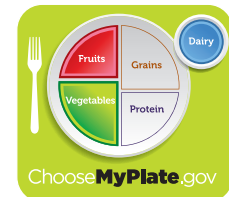
Note: Additional messages for mothers of preschool children can be found in the fruit and vegetable, whole-grain, and milk sections.



## Appendix C:

### Messages and Supporting Content for Kids Ages 8-10 Years Old

# Milk, Fruits, and Vegetables Messages and Supporting Activities for Kids!



These kid-friendly messages and activity sheets engage and motivate kids by appealing to their desires to have energy for play and sports. Use these resources to tap into kids' sense of fun and fantasy. Capture their attention and let them learn while having fun by encouraging kids to play the Track and Field Fuel Up Challenge Game (<http://www.fns.usda.gov/multimedia/games/trackandfield/index.html>) See communication tools for more information.

#### Messages for 8- to 10-Year-Old Kids

- 1 Eat smart to play hard. Drink milk at meals.
- 2 Fuel up with milk at meals. And soar through your day like a rocket ship.
- 3 Snack like a super hero. Power up with fruit and yogurt.
- 4 Eat smart to play hard. Eat fruits and veggies at meals and snacks.
- 5 Fuel up with fruits and veggies. And soar through your day like a rocket ship.



# Fuel up with milk at meals.

# And soar through your day like a rocket ship.



Make fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk your rocket fuel.

Want to grow big and strong like an astronaut? You need milk to help build muscles and to provide fuel for your fun. Try these tips:

- Power up with breakfast. Drink a glass of low-fat milk with your food.
- Drink milk with snacks. Have a glass of low-fat milk at snacks to refuel your energy.
- Lunch, dinner, be a winner. Drink low-fat milk with meals.
- Play hard. Then renew your energy with a glass of low-fat milk.

## FUEL FOR YOUR BRAIN

**1: How many cups of milk per day does it take to fill your tank?**

You can get the answer by solving these questions:

What's  $1 + 1.5 =$  \_\_\_ ➔ That's how much you need if you are 8

What's  $4 - 1 =$  \_\_\_ ➔ That's how much you need if you are 9 or 10

**2: If you're looking for rocket fuel, what galaxy would you visit?**

- a. Whirlpool Galaxy      b. Milky Way Galaxy      c. Bode's Galaxy      d. Sculptor Galaxy

Milk gives you energy, so you can take off for the stars!

**3: What kind of cheese has craters like the moon?**

- a. Swiss Cheese      b. Blue Cheese      c. Macaroni & Cheese      d. Sharp Cheese



Answers: 1. Two and 1/2 cups if you are 8 years old and three cups if you are 9 or 10. Make sure you fill your tank every day, so you have energy to fly to the moon! 2. Milky Way Galaxy. 3. Swiss Cheese

# Eat smart to play hard.

# Eat fruits and veggies at meals and snacks.

Fruits and veggies give you energy to help you be a champion when you run and play. Eat them every day at meals, snacks, or for dessert. Ask mom or dad to help you make this recipe and share it with your family and friends. Don't have or like pineapple? Be creative! Use whatever fruits you have at home.



## "THE TRYING GAME"

Have you ever tried Amazing asparagus, Exciting eggplant, Peppy peppers, Spunky sweet potatoes, or Tangy mango? There are so many tasty fruits and vegetables, it's fun to see, touch, taste, and smell new ones you've never had before.

Use this chart to write about and draw the new fruits and vegetables you try. Can't think of any? Ask your family and friends to tell you their favorites and try some of those. You can even have a contest with your friends to see who is the Champion at trying new fruits and veggies.

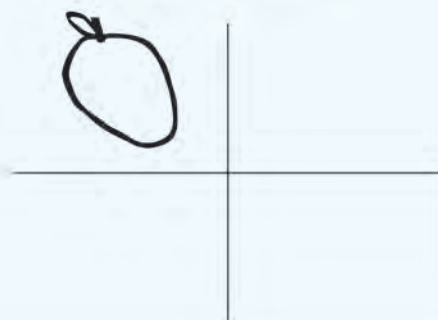
My new fruit or vegetable

How does it taste, smell, feel?

Draw a picture of it

mango

sweet



### Champion's POWER Packed Snack—makes 4 servings

- 2 cups canned crushed pineapple packed in juice
- 1 cup fresh or frozen berries, thawed
- 1 firm medium banana, peeled and sliced

- 1 cup low-fat vanilla yogurt
- 1/3 cup raisins

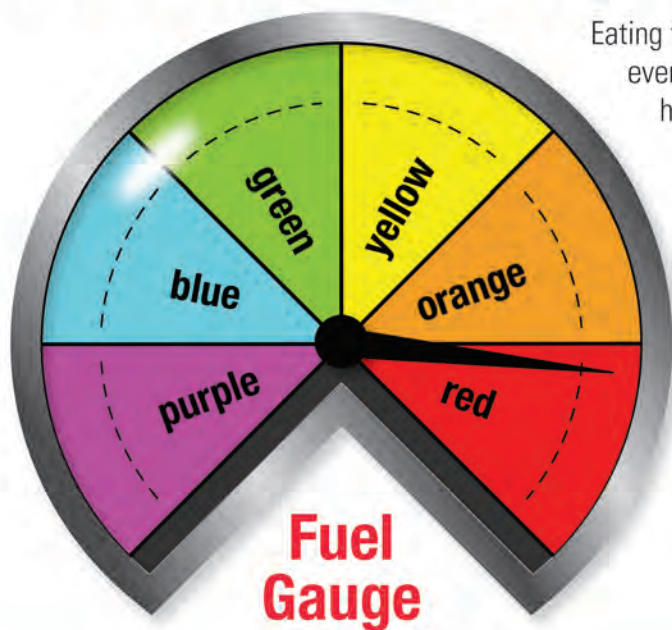
Have fun putting a layer of pineapple, berries, yogurt, banana slices, and raisins into each of 4 glasses.

Fuel up with  
fruits and veggies

And soar through  
your day like a  
rocket ship!



## GET READY FOR LIFTOFF



Eating fruits and vegetables of every color in the rainbow can help give you the different vitamins and minerals you need to soar through your day.

**Write the name of a fruit or veggie on the dotted lines in the fuel gauge that matches each color.**

## JOKES:

SuperKids love to laugh. Try these jokes with your friends.

**Q:** Why aren't bananas ever lonely?  
**A:** Because they come in bunches.

**Q:** What fruit always travels in groups of two?  
**A:** Pears

**Q:** What did the apple skin say to the apple?  
**A:** I've got you covered.

**Q:** What does corn say when it's picked?  
**A:** Ouch! My ears.

**HA HA ROFL!**  
**HA HA HA!**

**LOL!**

# Snack Like a super hero.

# Power up with fruit and yogurt.

## BE "SUPER" AT THE SUPERMARKET.

Help your family do the grocery shopping. Make your own list of the low-fat yogurt and other foods, like fruits, that keep Super Heroes strong. When you go to the store, say: "Guess what mom? I want to try something that's good for me." Or, "Believe it or not, I want to try a healthy snack." Then ask your Mom, Dad, or grandparent if you can pick out those foods yourself.

When you get home, ask if you can make your own Super Powerful Snacks, such as:

- **Muscle Popping Pops:** For a "cool snack," place your favorite fat-free or low-fat yogurt into an ice cube tray and freeze it. Grab a spoon and enjoy!
- **Super Smoothie:** In your favorite Super Hero glass, mix together plain low-fat yogurt with crushed fresh or frozen berries.



Match  
these words to the  
rap below:  
fruit, teeth, orange,  
yogurt, milk

## HERO RAP

Now listen up and I'll be brief.

**Calcium** builds strong bones and \_\_\_\_\_.

**Vitamin C** helps scratches heal.

So grab an \_\_\_\_\_ and give it a peel.

For muscles to grow like you've never seen,

Drink low-fat \_\_\_\_\_ for its **protein**.

Mix low-fat yogurt with \_\_\_\_\_ to see

How sweet and tasty **Vitamin D** can be.

Eat fruits and low-fat \_\_\_\_\_ each day

For the Super Kid energy

To keep rappin' away!

## Appendix D:

### Online Communication Tools for Mothers and Elementary School Age Kids

# Online Videos, and Video Game

Increase the number of times your audiences hear and experience your messages by placing a link to these interactive, online tools on your Web site, in blogs, and in electronic and print communications. The tools convey messages and select tips that support and help moms and kids to apply current nutrition guidelines. The content of these tools come from the core messages and related tips, advice, and guidance to address the “what,” “why,” and “how” elements relevant to each behavior. These are examples of a few of the many tools you can create for your audiences using these tested resources. To access these tools, go to [http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/corenutritionmessages/online\\_communication\\_tools\\_page.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/corenutritionmessages/online_communication_tools_page.htm).

#### **Communication Tools**

These ready-to-go resources for moms deliver small but important components of the messages, actionable tips, and advice on each of the topics. Each of the tools conveys information mothers indicated as important to them, such as meal preparation tips and ideas, health and nutrition benefits that underscore why they should adopt a specific behavior, and options that provide flexibility to fit their lifestyles.

## Videos

These short videos feature a mother addressing each of the topics using a mother-to-mother conversational style that personalizes the information and connects with the audience. The videos are online for viewing. You can also add a direct link to the videos on your Web site. Limited supplies of the videos are available to program staff in DVD format. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/core-nutrition/online-communication-tools>



Whole Grains



Child Feeding

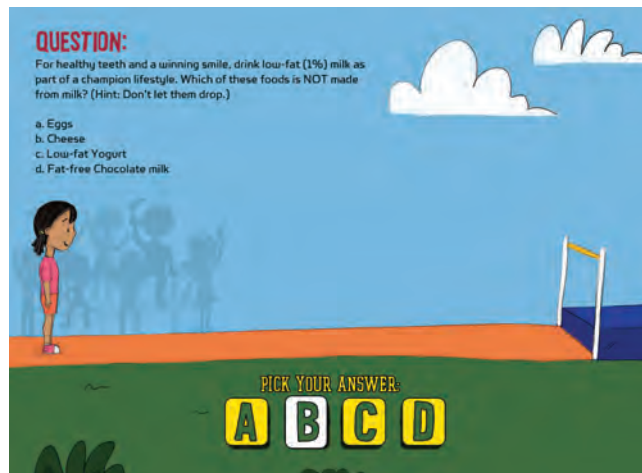


Milk



## Communication Tools for Kids Ages 8-10 Years Old

The **Track and Field Fuel Up Challenge Game** leverages the messages and supporting content in ways that appeal to and challenge kids. It uses an engaging approach that allows kids to have fun while learning about making healthier choices such as low-fat milk, fruits and vegetables, and whole-grain foods. In this interactive game, kids go for the gold by responding to time-sensitive questions that help improve their knowledge, motivation, and skills in making healthier choices. The kids compete in four Track and Field events by responding to random questions about healthy eating. The faster the kids answer correctly, the more skill their player has in his or her event. The game gets kids moving by nudging them to get up, celebrate, and warm up to prepare for the next event. Players answering all four questions correctly get a gold trophy. The online game is a Flash-based application. There is also a separate text-based HTML application. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/core-nutrition/online-communication-tools>



## Appendix E:

### Resources Using the FNS Core Nutrition Messages

# Examples of How To Use the Core Nutrition Messages

Let your creativity soar! Use the tested messages, tips, and advice to jumpstart the developmental process for new nutrition education resources and to update ongoing efforts. Together with MyPlate, these resources help communicate the Dietary Guidelines for Americans in ways that are both motivational and easy to understand. The messages can be the main focus of your communication (such as on billboards) or can be integrated with materials that are broader in scope (for instance, a nutrition curriculum). Mix and match messages and supporting content to customize materials to meet your clients' needs. You can use these resources in many types of education materials, including print, video, digital media, and Web-based education resources, and integrate them into group discussions and presentations. The following examples illustrate some of the many ways you can use the messages and supporting content to create communication tools to inspire your audience to choose healthier foods.





Michigan Nutrition Network included messages in the Kid Approved: Healthy Snacks recipe book. Also see billboards in Chapter 5.

## Confetti Bean Salsa

Serving size: ½ cup  
Servings per recipe: 6

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 can (15 oz) red or black beans
- 1 can (11 oz) corn
- ½ small green pepper, chopped.
- 1 cup Salsa

### DIRECTIONS

1. Drain corn and black beans. Set aside.
2. Chop green pepper.
3. Mix all ingredients in a bowl and serve.
4. Refrigerate any leftovers.

**TOTAL TIME: 5 MINUTES    PREP TIME: 5 MINUTES**

**Prep Tip:** To avoid having to chop the green pepper you can look for Spanish or Mexican corn at the store. This corn has red and green peppers chopped and mixed with it already.

**Nutrition Tip:** To reduce the sodium in this recipe, rinse the canned foods after draining them.



*They learn from watching you. Eat fruits and veggies and your kids will, too.*

### Nutrition Information per Serving:

- 90 calories
- 0 g fat
- 19 g carbohydrate
- 4 g protein
- 4 g fiber
- 450 mg sodium

Team Nutrition, USDA uses a variety of messages, tips, and narratives in the resources available at <http://teamnutrition.usda.gov>. Below are examples:

**Meet MyPlate**

The **MyPlate** picture reminds us to eat foods from all five food groups for good health: Vegetables, Fruits, Grains, Protein, and Dairy. Foods from each of these groups provide nutrition the body needs.

Most people do not eat enough fruits and vegetables. The amount of fruits and vegetables a person needs to eat each day depends on age, gender, and physical activity level. A 10-year-old girl or boy who gets about 30-60 minutes of physical activity each day needs 2½ cups of vegetables and 1½ cups of fruit each day. An active 11-year-old girl or boy who gets more than 60 minutes of physical activity each day needs more: 2½ to 3 cups of vegetables and 2 cups of fruit. You can learn about how much of each food group you or a family member needs at <http://www.choosemyplate.gov>.

Children and adults need to eat many types of vegetables during the week. Eating a variety helps the body get the nutrients it needs for good health. Most people do not eat enough dark-green, red, and orange vegetables, and beans and peas. Has your family eaten any of these vegetables this week?

Dark-Green Vegetables	Red and Orange Vegetables	Beans and Peas
Broccoli	Acorn squash	Black beans
Collard greens	Butternut squash	Black-eyed peas
Kale	Carrots	Garbanzo beans (chickpeas)
Leaf lettuce	Pumpkin	Kidney beans
Mustard greens	Red bell peppers	Lentils
Romaine lettuce	Sweet potatoes	Pinto beans
Spinach	Turnips	Soy beans
		White beans

**“I’m hungry.”**  
That’s the first thing my kids say when they come through the door. They go straight into the kitchen to get their own snacks. Whatever my kids see, they eat. So I keep cut-up veggies on a low shelf in the fridge and fresh fruit on the counter. If I don’t have fresh produce, I use canned or frozen. It takes a little planning, but it’s worth it. ☺☺

**Make half your plate fruits and vegetables is an easy way to remember to include these foods at meals. Fruits and vegetables also make great snacks.**

**Tips for Families With School-Age Children**

**Make half your plate fruits and vegetables—on a budget**

- Fresh, frozen, and canned fruits and vegetables are all smart choices. Look for sales and buy some of each to last until your next shopping trip.
- Choose frozen vegetables that do not have added fat, salt, or sugars.
- Buy canned fruits packed in “100% juice” or water.
- Look for canned vegetables that say “No added salt.”

**Start every day the whole-grain way**

- Serve whole-grain versions of cereal, bread, or pancakes at breakfast.
- Whole grains with more fiber will help your kids feel fuller longer so they stay alert in school.
- Choose foods with “100% whole wheat” or “100% whole grains” on the label. Or check the ingredient list to see if the word “whole” is before the first ingredient listed (for example, whole-wheat flour). If it is, it’s whole grain.

**Milk matters**

Children of every age, and adults too, need the calcium, protein, and vitamin D found in milk for strong bones, teeth, and muscles.

- Drink fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk at meals.
- If you’re lactose intolerant, try lactose-free or lactose-reduced milk or calcium-fortified soy beverages.

**Try These Kid-Friendly Snack Ideas:**

**Fruit Swords With Yogurt Dip**

- Put pieces of fruit on a toothpick, skewer, or straw.
- Cover with plastic wrap and store in the refrigerator until snack time.
- Serve with low-fat strawberry (Strawberry Dip) or lime (Lime Dip) yogurt for dipping.

**Happy Snack Packs**

- Fill small containers or snack bags with cut-up veggies.
- Add a small container of fat-free ranch dressing for dipping.
- Decorate the outside of the bags with stickers.
- Store in the refrigerator on a shelf where they are easy for your child to see.

Above left: MyPlate at Home

Above: Dig In! at Home

Left: Garden Detective News

New Hampshire used the “They’re still growing” milk message in the newsletter that was mailed to about 36,000 SNAP households.

**Milk ...the Best Choice for Kids**

You know milk is good for babies and toddlers. Did you know It's equally as important for elementary school-aged children?

Milk helps growing children form strong bones and teeth. It's also good for their growing muscles. When children drink plenty of milk their risk for osteoporosis when they grow up is lower.

**They're still growing.**  
**Help your kids grow strong.**  
**Serve fat-free or low-fat milk at meals.**

**What kind of milk should you serve?**  
 There are lots of types of milk. Fat-free and low-fat milk are the healthiest.

- **Fat-free milk** is also called skim milk or non-fat milk. All of the fat is removed from the milk, leaving behind the healthy nutrients.
- **Low-fat milk** is also called 1% milk. "One percent" refers to the amount of fat in the milk. Most of the fat has been removed from the milk. Only 1% of the milk is made of fat.
- **There is also 2% milk.** It has double the fat of 1% milk. But it has less fat than whole milk.
- **Whole milk** has the most fat. 3.5% of the milk is fat.

**Mealtime is Family Time**

**Children learn from watching you**

Eat fruits and veggies and they will too

- Eat breakfast and they will too

**Make mealtime family time**

- **Cook together**
- **Eat together**
- **Talk together**

Pennsylvania SNAP-Ed developed slide presentations that incorporated the FNS Core Messages for Moms of Preschoolers. These slides can be used in groups and viewed online.

**ChooseMyPlate.gov** “Health and Nutrition Information for Preschoolers” page contains several of the child feeding messages and tips.



*They learn from watching you.  
Eat fruits and veggies and your kids will too.*



*Patience works better than pressure. Offer your children a variety of foods. Then let them choose how much to eat.*

**WIC** included child feeding messages in “Healthy Eating for Preschoolers” tip sheets available on the WICWorks Web site. <http://wicworks.nal.usda.gov/topics-z/myplate-resources>

## Healthy Eating for preschoolers

**ChooseMyPlate.gov**

**Get your child on the path to healthy eating.**

*Focus on the meal and each other.*  
Your child learns by watching you. Children are likely to copy your table manners, your likes and dislikes, and your willingness to try new foods.

*Offer a variety of healthy foods.*  
Let your child choose how much to eat. Children are more likely to enjoy a food when eating it is their own choice.

*Be patient with your child.*  
Sometimes new foods take time. Give children a taste at first and be patient with them. Offer new foods many times.

*Let your children serve themselves.*  
Teach your children to take small amounts at first. Let them know they can get more if they are still hungry.

*Cook together.*

*Eat together.*

*Talk together.*

*Make meal time family time.*

U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Food and Nutrition Service

FNS-451  
October 2012  
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Virginia paired messages with inspiring photos to create a slide show for digital photo displays. Also see Calendar in Chapter 5.



New Mexico SNAP-Ed produced Spanish versions of the videos for whole grains, low-fat milk, and child feeding and a new video on fruits and vegetables that convey the core messages. They developed a series of Spanish and English posters that include the messages. These materials are part of a social marketing campaign the State is developing.



Above: New Mexico SNAP-Ed produced videos using fruit and vegetable messages in Spanish and English. <http://prc-snap-ed.org/>.



New Mexico SNAP-Ed produced both English and Spanish posters, available at <http://prc-snap-ed.org/>.



Social media is an effective way to reach your audience with reinforcing messages. See examples below. Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, and blogs (see the core message Training materials page for more).



FNS developed fact sheets, recipes, videos, rollover widgets, and an online game. These resources are available for mothers on the Especially for Moms Web page at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/core-nutrition/especially-moms>.

## Start them early with Whole Grains

**Start them while they're young.**

When you introduce whole-grain foods to children when they are young, it helps them learn to love them.

**Start the day the whole grain way.**

- **Cereal Mixer** – Combine two or three of their favorite whole-grain cereals with different shapes. Talk about the shapes to help them learn to name them.
- **Oatmeal Topper** – Top it with a favorite fruit and spices.
- **Wake and Make Burrito** – Stuff a whole-grain tortilla with chopped veggies, scrambled eggs and low-fat cheese.

**Quick Fact**  
Whole grains are rich sources of vitamins, minerals, fiber and other nutrients that help keep your kids healthy and strong.

## Create Fun Snacks

- **Pre-pack Your Snacks** – Pack a sandwich bag with a little whole-grain dry cereal for your kids to eat at the park, mall or grocery store.
- **Crack Them Up** – Serve whole-grain crackers with soup or salads for lunch. Serve them with low-fat cheese and a slice of tomato on top for a quick snack.

**Quick Fact**  
These foods are always whole grain. Oatmeal, brown rice, wild rice, pop corn.

## Make Quick and Easy Meals with Whole Grains

- **Make a Healthy Pizza** – Top a whole-grain tortilla or English muffin with fresh tomato slices, low-fat cheese, leftover chicken or other lean meat and pizza spices. Heat and serve!
- **Pass the Pasta** – Try different shapes and colors of whole-wheat pasta. Sprinkle it with a little olive oil and low-fat cheese. Add chopped veggies and spices or tomato sauce for a quick lunch or dinner. Use whole-grain pasta for your macaroni and cheese recipes and other family favorites, too.

**Quick Fact: How to tell if it's a whole grain?** Check the ingredient list. Take a few seconds to see if the food is made from whole grains. Look for the word "whole" before the first ingredient.

Think out of the box! Messages, tips, and photos can fit in unexpected places.



Above: Alabama put messages on WIC checks.



They learn from watching you.

Right: Michigan Nutrition Network put messages on farmers market token bags.

**Eat more fruit and veggies and they will too.**

This material was funded by the State of Michigan with federal funds from the United States Department of Agriculture Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program by way of the Michigan Nutrition Network at the Michigan Farmers Foundation. These restrictions are published from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, political beliefs or disability. People who need help buying nutritious food for a better diet call the toll free Michigan Food Assistance Program Hotline: (800) 438-6833.

Notes:

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Revised April 2014