

# Fruits and Vegetables Are a Winner at Arthur S. May

## Issue

Eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables may reduce the risk for stroke, cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and may protect against certain cancers. Fruits and vegetables are naturally low in calories and high in fiber and therefore play a role in the prevention and treatment of obesity.

U.S. dietary guidelines recommend that individuals over age 2 eat 5 to 9 servings of fruits and vegetables daily, yet fewer than 15% of elementary school-age children eat five or more servings each day. The average 6-11 year old eats only 3.5 servings of fruits and vegetables daily. On any given day, more than half of all elementary school-age children eat no fruit and 20% eat less than one serving of vegetables.

The school environment can have a significant impact on fruit and vegetable intake among children. A number of successful approaches have been implemented in schools that have increased awareness about the importance of fruits and vegetables in the diet and increased consumption.

## Intervention

Arthur S. May School in Dutchess County's Arlington school district serves 488 kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade students. The school signed up for the Fit Kids program in June 2007, one of 73 schools to participate in Fit Kids. An informal cafeteria survey indicated that at most, only 20% of the students were taking a fruit and/or a vegetable at lunch. To address this issue, the principal, physical education teacher, food service director and Fit Kids coordinator from the Dutchess County Department of Health collaborated to develop an event that would motivate students to taste new fruits and vegetables.

In October 2007, Arthur S. May School initiated an eight week program. Every Wednesday, the lunch program featured three to four fresh fruits and vegetables, personally served by the principal and assistant principal. Low fat dips were provided to

accompany fresh vegetable selections. Approximately twenty different fresh fruit and vegetables were served over the course of the program, including pea pods, mangos, baby spinach, red cabbage, cauliflower and yellow squash. Children who brought lunch from home were able to participate in the taste tests because the food service program absorbed this cost. Students received a variety of nutrition stickers for sampling the foods and classes with a high level of participation were awarded 10 additional minutes of recess time with the principal.

## Impact

This activity was well received by students, who looked forward to "Fruit and Vegetable Wednesdays."

- During the promotion, 80% of the students ate a fruit and/or vegetable at lunch.
- When students were asked what they liked best about the program – the stickers or the fruit and vegetables - fruit and vegetables were clearly the winner!



A student assembly is planned to review the activity and to motivate children to continue to select fruits and vegetables at lunch time.

## Importance of Impact

Increased consumption of fruits and vegetables is one component of a healthy diet. Good eating habits that are developed during childhood can have a positive lifelong effect. They can reduce the risk of obesity, stroke, cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and certain types of cancer. This intervention primarily addressed diet, one factor that contributes to childhood obesity. At the same time, classes were given the opportunity to earn extra recess time based on their participation in the fruit and vegetable promotion. Physical activity, another factor that plays a role in childhood obesity, was therefore addressed as well.

## Contact Information:

Toby Miller, R.D., M.A., M.B.A., Fit Kids Coordinator  
Westchester County Department of Health  
Phone: (914) 813-5209  
E-mail: tlm1@westchestergov.com



**NYS Healthy Heart Program**