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Department of Family Medicine at Stony Brook Medical Center

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## NUTRITION UNIT

### 6TH GRADE

#### LESSON SIX - ADVERTISING

##### OBJECTIVES

- Students will be able to identify factors that influence their food choices.
- Students will be able to identify strategies that advertisers use, and apply this information to making healthy food choices.

##### MATERIALS NEEDED

Provided in the curriculum:

Other:

- printed advertisements (optional)
- newsprint, markers
- pictures of fruits and vegetables (optional)

*Materials adapted from Byrd-Bredbenner, C., O'Connell, L.H., Laquatra, Idamarie, McGovern, K. Gillis, B. Nutrition in a Changing World: Concerns of Young Adults. The Pennsylvania State University, 1982.*

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## REVIEW

Has anyone given more thought to their personal Pyramids? Are your Pyramids top heavy, i.e. with too many servings from the tip of the Pyramid? Do you have enough servings from the Grain Group, the Fruit Group, and the Vegetable Group to support the third and fourth levels of your Pyramid? What changes can you make to build well proportioned Pyramids?

## INTRODUCTION

Now that we have considered the different size and proportions of people's Pyramids (i.e. Mr. Couch Potato and Mr. Fit), let us consider what factors influence people's food choices. Why do we choose the foods we do?

There are lots of reasons why we eat the foods we do. Why do you think you eat the foods you eat? Prompt students for factors that influence their food choices, such as that is what my family eats at home, that is what my friends eat, taste, smell, texture, etc. Then suggest that one of the reasons might be that we saw something advertised on TV, on the radio, or in a magazine. Has anyone brought a food because they saw it advertised, or convinced your parent to buy something because it was on TV, etc.? What was the food? The main purpose of advertising is to sell something and advertisers spend millions of dollars trying to convince you to buy something. The cost of advertising is returned if the sales of the product increase, and the manufacturer of the product makes more money. Advertisers are trying to get you to spend your money.

First the advertiser has to capture your attention in a very short time - before you hit the remote control or radio buttons. Most radio and TV commercials last only 30

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seconds. Catchy music and pictures, as well as famous people are used to do this. After capturing your attention, the advertisement has to make you want the product, and then go out and buy it. To do this advertisers appeal to our basic needs, like our need to be accepted by our peers. Advertisers also try to make us familiar with their product. Associating products with images of popularity, beauty, happiness, and athletic ability appeals to our desire to have these qualities ourselves. In other words, advertisers want you to believe that if you buy their product you will buy these qualities as well.

As students to think of an advertisement they saw yesterday. What qualities were associated with the product? Did the advertisement make it seem that if you purchased the product, you would take on those qualities?

Here are some of the common advertising strategies:

1. **PROBLEM/SOLUTION** - The person on the screen has a problem. A second person enters the scene with a solution and throws in a sales pitch to the audience. For example, a person in a diner spills a cup of coffee (problem), and the waitress zooms over to clean it up with a special brand of paper towel (solution) while explaining all of the advantages of the particular brand (sales pitch).
2. **DEMONSTRATION** - This strategy shows the product being used. Many fast food restaurants use this strategy and show satisfied customers eating their foods.
3. **PERSONIFICATION** - The product is made into a fictitious living creature. Talking raisins dropping into cereal boxes and hamburgers with arms and legs enable us to respond emotionally to the cute creatures.

4. TESTIMONY - Somebody, perhaps a famous person or an expert, describes their positive experience using the product. This is often used by weight loss products, with before and after pictures of people who have lost weight presumably by using the product.
5. SLICE OF LIFE - The advertisement shows a short story that could happen anywhere. For example, a young boy or girl loses a soccer game, and a parent gives him a piece of candy to help make him feel better.
6. JINGLES OR PHRASES - These seem to be a favorite of advertisers. Here the product is associated with a very catchy jingle, such as “two all beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese, pickles onion on a sesame bun” and “you deserve a break today”.
7. USE OF PLEASURE WORDS OR APPEALING PRODUCT PICTURES - Words like happy, fun, delicious, tasty and tempting lead consumers to believe that the product tastes good or that they will feel great if they buy the product. Are Sugar Frosted Flakes really “GRRREAT”? Would you describe Campbell’s soup as “mmm mmm good”? Words that describe food quality are often accompanied with appealing pictures. Close up pictures of cakes or cookies can be mouthwatering. Camera angles, special camera lenses, music, sound, and lighting are also often used to enhance a product’s best qualities.
8. FREE GIFT - Cereals, some snack items, and some fast foods may have a free toy that comes with the product or can be received by sending in proof of purchase seals. This special offer increased the desirability of the product. Therefore, if two products of equal

quality were available, the fact that one offered something free could be the basis for making a decision to buy that product.

9. ENDORSEMENT BY A FAMOUS PERSON - A jello commercial with Bill Cosby may capture viewers attention to a greater extent than if an unknown person appeared with the product.

The growing interest in health and fitness has caused food product advertisers to include nutritional claims in many of their ads.

In order to sell products, companies must advertise the qualities that make their products different or special. In order to make healthy food choices, consumers must carefully evaluate advertisements, before spending their money.

#### **ADVERTISING AND THE FOOD GUIDE PYRAMID**

How many advertisements have you seen for cereals or soda over the last week.  
How many advertisements have you seen for fresh fruits or vegetables over the last week.  
(Students should conclude that they see more advertisements for cereals and sodas than for fresh fruits and vegetables.) Why do you think that is so? Manufacturers of processed foods have more money to spend on advertising than growers of fresh and unprocessed products. Let us consider the Grain Group. Manufacturers of processed grains, such as cereals, bread products, and rices that come with sauce mixes spend more money on advertising than growers of lightly processed grains like whole wheat flour and plain rice. That is because the extra ingredients to make these processed products are relatively cheap, but they can charge much more for these products. How many people have seen an advertisement for a fresh fruit or vegetable? There are very few, except for

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some seasonal adds from growers, such as Washington State apple growers. The more processed the fruit or vegetable, such as canned fruits, fruit drinks and tomato sauce, the more money manufacturers have to spend on advertising. The more money they spend on advertising, the more likely they are to increase the sales of their products and their profits, and the more they can spend on advertising. This cycle keeps feeding itself, and more and more money is spent on fancier and fancier advertisements.

Although there is some advertising of fresh milk and meat products from trade groups such as the National Dairy Council and the Beef Industry Council, there is much more advertising to processed products like cheese and hot dogs.

Foods in the Fat and Sugar Group at the tip of the Pyramid, which includes very heavily processed foods like chips, soda, cake and cookies, are heavily advertised. These advertisements increase pressure on us and our peers to increase our purchases of these foods. We or our peers, in turn, may put pressure on our friends and family members to buy and eat these foods as well. No one expects you to stop eating these foods altogether. However, the goal is for you to consider these advertisements more carefully, and for you not to be so easily manipulated. Remember, you are in control of what you buy and advertisers are simply trying to fool you.

#### **ACTIVITY (CHOOSE 1)**

##### **1. EXAMINING FOOD ADVERTISEMENTS:**

Cut out pictures of advertisements and mount them on heavy paper. Hold up an advertisement and walk around room. Ask students to identify which strategies are being used to sell the product. What food group is it in. Does the product provide a lot of

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nutrients? Is it high in fat or sugar? Ask students if they or the adults in the house have ever purchased the product. What other factors, other than the advertisement, would they consider when deciding whether or not to buy the product (such as bought it before and liked it, friends eat it. etc.)? After examining the add and where it is in the Pyramid, would they buy it less often or chose not to buy it for the first time? Repeat with a few advertisements.

## 2. CREATE AN ADVERTISEMENT

Have the students work in small groups of 3 to 5. Give each group a large sheet of newsprint, some markers/crayons, and a picture of a fruit or a vegetable (or groups can pick their own fruit or vegetable). Each group is to make up an ad to sell the fruit and vegetable to their friends who will see the ad on TV. They can make up a 15 to 30 second skit or print advertisement that will convince someone to eat the vegetable.

Some questions they can consider....

What do you need to help “sell” your fruit or vegetable? (a catchy song, slogan, etc.)

What kind of “promises” will you make? Are they honest?

Who will you need to endorse or promote your fruit or vegetable?

Have each group present their skit, role-playing the various parts, or their print ad.

What did you learn while you were making up your ad?

What part of making up an ad was the easiest? Most difficult?

How did you decide which approach was best?

What will you remember about advertising the next time you see an ad that's trying to sell you some food?

#### Conclusions

- When viewing advertisements, students should be reminded to consider the facts before deciding whether to buy a product or not. The only facts that they can depend on are those found on the Nutrition Facts food label.
- Students should remember that information that advertisers provide is biased, and developed to convince people to buy the product.
- Encourage students to spend their food dollars wisely, balancing good nutrition with good taste.