



MONTHLY NUTRITION-THEMES THAT SUPPORT THE *MICHIGAN NUTRITION STANDARDS*

Many classrooms and schools have monthly themes that often have a food or health focus. That's great! Integrating nutrition education into the core curriculum and providing students with consistent messages in a variety of venues throughout the school will help make "healthy" the easy choice for students. Work with your school-based team and fellow staff members to make sure food offered and served as part of these themes meet the *Michigan Nutrition Standards*.

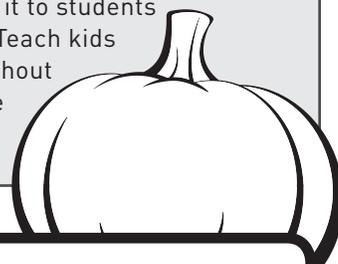
IDEAS FOR MONTHLY THEMES INCLUDE:

SEPTEMBER

- **APPLE MONTH:** Decorate a cafeteria bulletin board with information about different kinds, and the nutrition value of apples. Serve different kinds of foods made with apples that meet the Nutrition Standards as components of school meals and snacks such as applesauce, apple juice, apple muffins, apple pancakes, apple smoothies, and more.
- **NATIONAL FRUIT & VEGGIES—MORE MATTERS MONTH:** Serve and promote fruits and vegetables. Visit the More Matters Web site for activity ideas and recipes: www.morematters.org
- **NATIONAL CHILDHOOD OBESITY AWARENESS MONTH:** Plan games and activities that will teach children about nutrition and encourage increased physical activity. Teach them about serving size.

OCTOBER

- **NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH WEEK:** Visit the National School Lunch Week website at <http://www.schoolnutrition.org> for information, tools and promotional resources related to the yearly theme.
- **NATIONAL FARM TO SCHOOL MONTH:** Start planning for a school garden. Survey students to find out what they would like to grow. Contact your local county Extension office to see if they have someone who can help.
- **NATIONAL POPCORN MONTH:** Have a Celebrate Popcorn Day. Prepare different kinds of popcorn made with little or no added salt and offer it to students as a healthy snack. Teach kids to make popcorn without oil, in the microwave in a paper bag.



TEACH STUDENTS TO BE SERVING SIZE WISE!

Let them see what a proper serving is by comparing everyday objects. This can help prevent them from eating more than they need and help them to maintain a healthy weight.

EXAMPLES:

- **2 ½ OUNCES MEAT:** size/thickness of a deck of cards
- **MEDIUM PIECE OF FRUIT:** a tennis ball
- **1 OUNCE OF CHEESE:** 4 stacked dice
- **½ CUP ICE CREAM:** tennis ball
- **½ CUP RICE, PASTA, MASHED POTATOES OR BROCCOLI:** about the size of a fist
- **1 TSP PEANUT BUTTER:** the tip of your thumb
- **1 OUNCE OF NUTS:** one small handful

**NOVEMBER**

- **THANKSGIVING:** Teach students about what the pilgrims really ate on Thanksgiving: fish, vegetables, nuts and dried fruits. Talk about how our diets have changed (for the better and for the worse) since the time of the pilgrims.
- **PEANUT BUTTER MONTH:** Taste-test different kinds of peanut butter: crunchy, smooth, natural. Set up a PB and J bar and allow students to make their own signature sandwich using whole grain bread, peanut butter, and a variety of toppings including grapes, dried fruit, apple slices, banana, pickles and more.
- **AMERICAN DIABETES MONTH:** Set up a creative display or bulletin board that educates students about diabetes. Include the warning signs and information about how you can prevent some types of diabetes by maintaining a healthy weight, eating right, and being active.

DECEMBER

- **TROPICAL FRUITS MONTH:** Offer fresh or dried tropical fruits to taste-test such as pineapple and mango and papaya. Try new recipes featuring tropical fruits and juices.
- **HAND-WASHING WEEK:** Practice proper hand-washing with students. Make it fun. For resources go to www.fightbac.org
- **NATIONAL PEAR MONTH:** Taste-test different kinds of pears in the classroom or include them on the school lunch line. Prepare a new recipe that meets the *Michigan Nutrition Standards* with fresh or canned pears and share that recipe with families via the school menu or foodservice portion of the school web site.

JANUARY

- **NATIONAL OATMEAL MONTH:** Offer students fun and different varieties of oatmeal to taste-test. Oatmeal is a whole grain and eating whole grains reduces your risk of chronic disease.
- **NATIONAL FIBER FOCUS MONTH:** Teach students that fruits, vegetables and whole grains are high in fiber. Include and highlight fiber-rich foods that are on the school menu or offered as snacks. Send home recipes to families that are high in fiber.
- **VITAMIN D AND CALCIUM:** Teach students to consume 3-4 servings of low-fat dairy foods every day. Point out the low-fat dairy choices that are part of school meals and those that are in your school vending machines (if you have them). Encourage parents to serve or to send to school low-fat dairy foods that meet the standards such as single-serving yogurt, string cheese, or flavored milk.





FEBRUARY

- **CHILDREN'S DENTAL HEALTH MONTH:** For healthy teeth and gums, and fewer cavities, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that children only drink milk or water between meals, instead of other beverages. Teach students how to recognize what a healthy beverage is, and talk about the beverages offered that are part of school meals, sold in vending machines and school stores, and served at snack time in the classroom.
- **AMERICAN HEART MONTH:** Teach children about heart-healthy foods such as fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Encourage students to be physically active every day and send home heart-healthy recipes that meet the nutrition standards.
- **NATIONAL SWEET POTATO MONTH:** Grow sweet potatoes or sweet potato vines in the classroom. Try new main or side dishes in school meals that are made with sweet potatoes instead of white potatoes such as sweet potato quesadillas or sweet potato fries. low-fat dairy foods that meet the standards such as single-serving yogurt, string cheese, or flavored milk.



MARCH

- **NATIONAL NUTRITION MONTH:** Showcase and teach nutrition and healthy eating information in school. Go to www.eatright.org for information and resources that focus on the yearly theme.
- **ST. PATRICK'S DAY:** Add green food coloring to milk, serve Irish oatmeal and taste-test green fruits and veggies such as grapes, kiwi, celery, spinach and more.
- **NATIONAL SCHOOL BREAKFAST WEEK:** Research shows that breakfast eaters have improved memory, problem-solving skills, verbal fluency and creative abilities. Have fun promoting school breakfast or eating a balanced breakfast at home. Go to the National School Breakfast Week website for ideas related to the yearly theme: <http://www.schoolnutrition.org/Content.aspx?id=54>



**APRIL**

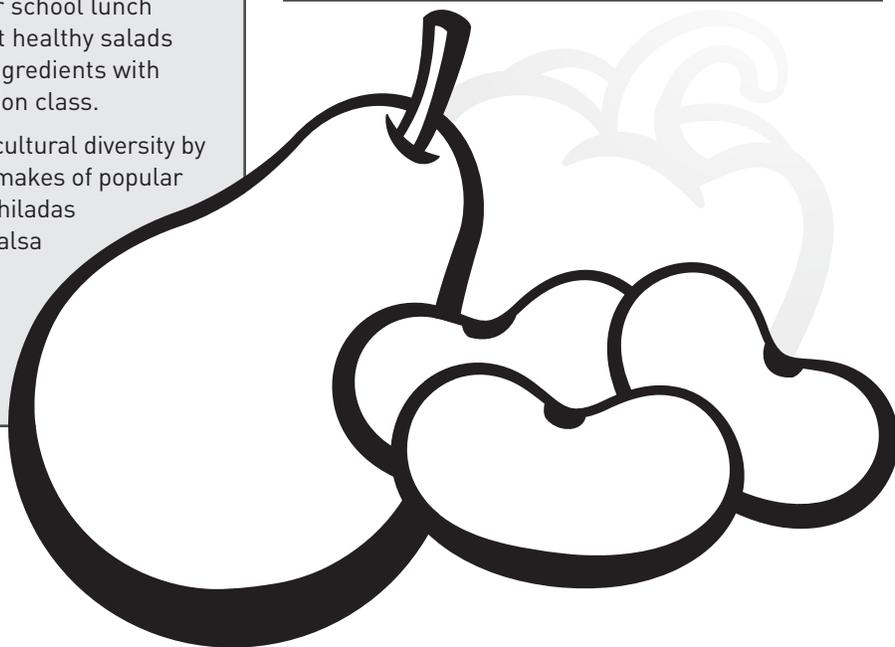
- **NATIONAL GARDEN MONTH:** Plant seeds and grow delicious fruits and vegetables in the classroom. For more how-to's on school gardening go to: www.kidsgardening.org
- **NATIONAL SOY FOODS MONTH:** Taste-test different soy foods (edamame, soy nuts, soy milk) in the classroom or cafeteria. Talk to student about eating a variety of foods including soy.
- **NATIONAL TV TURN OFF WEEK:** Conduct a school or classroom Turn Off the TV Challenge. Have students track and report back on all the fun things they did instead of watching TV. Host a Turn Off the TV Family Physical Activity night at the school and encourage community members to attend.

MAY

- **HEALTHY BONES (OSTEOPOROSIS PREVENTION) MONTH:** School-age and teenage years are critical windows for helping kids develop the strongest, densest bones possible. The Dietary Guidelines recommend 3 cups a day of dairy, which provide calcium and eight other essential nutrients that help build strong bones. Promote lunch-time milk drinking. Research shows that kids who go for a container of milk at lunch are more likely to meet or exceed the recommended calcium intake for both lunch and the entire day compared to kids who drink other beverages at lunch.
- **NATIONAL SALAD MONTH:** Offer a special Salad of The Week that meets the *Michigan Nutrition Standards* on your school lunch or a la carte line. Talk about healthy salads and not-so-healthy salad ingredients with students in health or nutrition class.
- **CINCO DE MAYO:** Celebrate cultural diversity by offering new and healthy remakes of popular Mexican dishes such as enchiladas or tacos. Try a new kind of salsa (May is also National Salsa Month). Share the recipes with parents via the school newsletter or web site.

JUNE

- **NATIONAL FRESH FRUIT AND VEGETABLE MONTH:** Teach students about fruits and vegetables that grow locally in your area. Talk about the health benefits of eating fresh fruits and veggies. In the cafeteria, feature a Fruit or Vegetable of the Day prepared in a new way that meets the Nutrition Standards.
- **NATIONAL DAIRY MONTH:** Decorate a hallway or cafeteria bulletin board with promotional items that encourage consumption of low-fat dairy foods such as fat-free milk, low-fat cheese or yogurt. Offer a smoothie made with fruit and yogurt that meets the *Michigan Nutrition Standards* on the a la carte line.

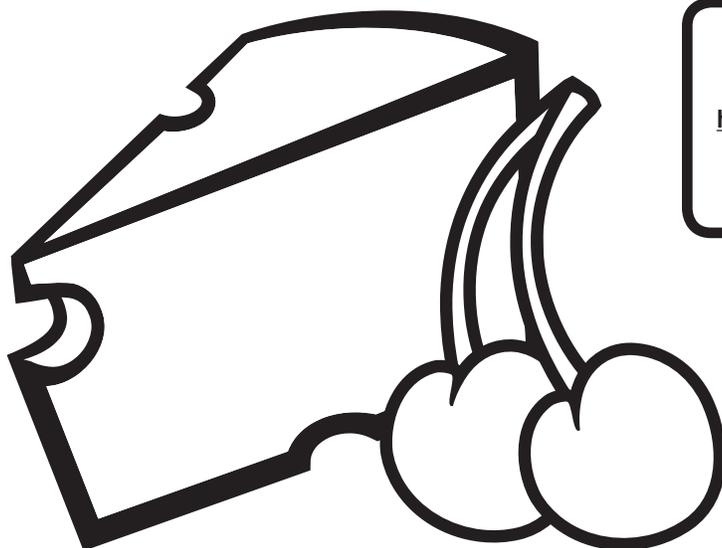


**JULY**

- **NATIONAL BLUEBERRY MONTH:** Take students in summer school or summer programs on a field trip to pick blueberries if they grow in your area. If not, purchase fresh blueberries and let students taste-test different low-sugar cereals topped with blueberries as a snack.
- **NUTRITIOUS SUMMER SNACKS:** Kids need healthy snacks to fuel their growing bodies and to keep them healthy. Together with students, brainstorm a healthy snack list (that meets the Nutrition Standards) and send that snack list home to parents. Be sure to include nutrient-rich foods, like low-fat cheese, yogurt, and low-fat and fat-free milk; fresh, canned and frozen fruits; vegetables, and whole grain foods that can be mixed and matched.
- **WATERMELON MONTH:** At the park or during summer programming, conduct a Watermelon Relay. Have kids race, carefully rolling whole watermelons from a start to finish line. After they're done, wash them, then cut them up and eat them.

**AUGUST**

- **FAMILY MEALS MONTH:** Encourage students and families to plan, prepare, and eat family meals together. Meal times provide the time to talk about food, nutrition and healthy eating. It's easier for children to make healthy food choices when they know the family's nutrition "rules of the road," and they see their parents making healthful choices. Send home or post to the school or summer program web site quick to fix, healthy balanced meals.
- **NATIONAL FARMERS MARKET WEEK:** Encourage shopping for fresh produce at local markets. Serve locally grown fruits and vegetables. Teach kids about where their food comes from and let them sample fruits and vegetables they may have never tried before.
- **SANDWICH MONTH:** Teach students to build a healthy sandwich based on the *Michigan Nutrition Standards*. Include whole grain bread, a lean protein and fruit and or a vegetable or two. Taste-test different kinds of whole grain breads including whole grain pitas, flat bread, tortillas, and bagels.



For more ideas visit USDA's Resource Library for Features of the Month:
http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/nal_display/index.php?info_center=14&tax_level=1&tax_subject=526



NOTES:

Lined writing area with a faint outline of the state of Michigan on the left and a faint outline of a bell pepper on the right.