



Teaching Sip Smart!™ Ontario - using the 'first, do no harm' approach

Teaching children about making healthy drink choices and discouraging sugar-sweetened beverages can often result in conversations about calories and body weight. The goal of Sip Smart!™ Ontario is to promote nutritious beverage choices, not to teach about healthy weights.

Children are vulnerable to low self-esteem related to appearance, body dissatisfaction, and unhealthy dieting behaviours. School-based healthy weights initiatives can result in unintended consequences, and may even trigger disordered eating patterns in children predisposed to developing weight-related disorders. (Pinhas et al, 2013). What follows are strategies for the implementation of the 'first do no harm' approach when delivering food and nutrition education.

Tips to apply the 'first, do no harm' approach:

- Use [Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide](#) as the basis to educate students:
 - Food is better classified as 'everyday' and 'sometimes' food rather than 'good' and 'bad'. Food which is high in nutrients and belongs to a food group is considered an 'everyday food' and food which is low in nutrients (and has added fat, sugar or salt) is a 'sometimes food'. For example, yogurt is an everyday food while ice cream is a sometimes food.
 - Show students which food and beverages fit into the four food groups. Explain to them that most sugary drinks do not fit within the four food groups and why. Teach them that there are healthier choices for beverages and that sugary drinks are an occasional treat.
- Avoid activities that involve counting calories. Instead focus on nutrients and health:
 - Different nutrients come from a variety of food and beverages and give us energy to learn, play, and grow.
 - Sugary drinks can displace water and other nutritious beverages (like milk), which can result in a lower intake of important nutrients, such as calcium and vitamin D.
 - Sugary drinks may increase the risk for diseases such as diabetes and poor oral health.
 - Some sugary drinks are often high in caffeine.

- Take the focus away from ‘body weight’:
 - Do not weigh students. Your students are still growing and children vary in body types and developmental stages. Discourage comparisons of weight and height to avoid weight preoccupation.
 - Do not calculate Body Mass Index (BMI) with students. BMI is not a tool to use with growing children and teenagers. Teach students that healthy people come in a variety of shapes and sizes.

- Do not assess student lunches/snacks for healthy food or beverages:
 - Children may have little control over the food and beverage choices in their lunch. School community members should be non-judgmental (e.g. labeling food or beverage as good or bad) on the nutritional value of a child’s lunch, especially without knowing the context of why certain food items have been included.
 - If you complete the Sip Smart!™ Ontario Drink Diary share and discuss the ‘class’ results rather than focusing on the sugary drink intake of any one child.
 - Drawing attention to an ‘unhealthy’ choice can isolate children from their peers and damage their self-esteem, causing them to feel shame. This can also happen if another child is seen receiving praise for bringing a ‘healthy’ choice.

- Be a positive role model:
 - Children are easily influenced by what they hear and see around them. Do not talk about your own body weight or ‘dieting’ behaviours when children are present.

Reference: Nutrition Tools for Schools©: Key Messages for Promoting Healthy Lunches and Snacks to Children and Youth (Pinhas et al, 2013).

