Background:

Planning a meal usually includes most of the following foods: meat, starch, vegetable, fruit, milk, water or other beverage. It may take the form of a sandwich, a hearty salad or a traditional family-style meal. Including a variety of foods is important for people of all ages to stay healthy because there is no one food that provides us with all the nutrients we need. Teaching this concept with example activities below is great – but remember that it should be complemented with actual meals & snacks served in your center that include variety as well.

Objective:

To introduce children to the concept that to grow up healthy, a balance and variety of foods is needed.

Suggested Activities:

(A) Watch Us Grow!

Materials:
- “Watch Us Grow!” Growth Chart (pages 18-23)
- Tape
- Pens, crayons, markers

Procedure:
1. Explain to children that they are constantly growing. Discuss the progression of their size from infants, to toddlers. Explain that the variety of foods we eat help us “grow.” Ask children to identify some of the different foods they eat. What did they eat for breakfast today? For dinner last night? Snack? Emphasize that a balance of different foods is needed to provide us with the many different nutrients our bodies need.
2. Tape up the growth chart with pictures of a variety of different foods. You may have students get creative, and have them color the pictures and “draw” other foods or cut out food pictures from old magazines or newspapers to add more variety to the growth chart.
3. Take each child’s height. Do this every quarter to show their progression of growth throughout the year.
4. With the children, reflect on their growth noting the variety of foods they have eaten to ‘grow up.’

(B) Pick Out the “Pair of Pears” Game

Materials:
- Food picture cards on pages 24-33
- Scissors
- Crayons, pens
Procedure:
1. Explain to children that there are many, many different kinds of foods and
drinks. Help children cut out the different food pictures on pages 24-33.
   Have them color the foods.
2. After all pictures are colored, mix the cards up and lay them face up on a
table.
3. Have children take turns picking out pairs of the same foods and drinks.
4. As pairs are matched, discuss different characteristics about the foods –
   what does it taste like? What color is it? What does it smell like? Where
does it come from? Have they eaten it before? Did they like it?

For a greater challenge as children get older, you can:
- Turn the cards upside down and have them use their memory to pick
  out pairs of the same foods and drinks
- Sort out a single set of all the different food and drink cards, and have
  them pick out pairs of foods and drinks that belong to the same food
  group (fruits, vegetables, grains, meats, milk). You may leave the
  “water” cards out of this game.
- With the blank cards on page 34, you or your children can draw and
  color new foods and include them in the stack of cards to add more
  variety. You could also cut out pictures from old magazines or the
  newspaper ads and paste them onto the cards as well. For
  clarification on specific food groups, please refer to the MyPyramid

(C) Books
  by Sexton Freymann and Joost Elffers, Arthur A. Levine Books, 2005
- “The Very Hungry Caterpillar” by Eric Carle, Scholastic Inc., 1987

(D) For parents at home
- *The Grocery Store Treasure Hunt* (pg 35) activity sheet is a fun activity
  parents can do with their children that reiterates the importance of variety.
  Parents can engage children with conversations about the characteristics
  of different foods as they shop for groceries that span all of the different
  food groups.
Watch Us Grow!
Eating a variety of foods helps us grow!

48 inches (4 feet)

Cut along dotted line and attach to 45 inch line of subsequent page
36 inches (3 feet)

Cut along dotted line and attach to 36 inch line of subsequent page
36 inches (3 feet)

Cut along dotted line and attach to 27 inch line of subsequent page
24 inches (2 feet)

Cut along dotted line and attach to 18 inch line of subsequent page
12 inches (1 foot)

Cut along dotted line and attach to 9 inch line of subsequent page
Pineapple
Fruit Group

Pear
Fruit Group

Orange
Fruit Group

Pineapple
Fruit Group

Pear
Fruit Group

Orange
Fruit Group
Canned Peaches
Fruit Group

100% Apple Juice
Fruit Group

Frozen Blueberries
Fruit Group
Bread
Grain Group

Rice
Grain Group

Popcorn
Grain Group
Chicken Meat Group

Hot Dog Meat Group

Kidney Bean Meat Group
Eggs
Meat Group

Canned Tuna
Meat Group

Peanut Butter
Meat Group

Eggs
Meat Group

Canned Tuna
Meat Group

Peanut Butter
Meat Group
Fat Free Milk
Milk Group

Fat Free Milk
Milk Group

Water

Water
Grocery Store Treasure Hunt

Parents, help us eat a balanced diet, by buying a variety of different foods and drinks at the grocery store. Follow the trail below through your local grocery store and pick up a variety of tasty “treasures” for our next meal.

*Note: The trail does not need to be followed exactly. Please practice safe food handling, by buying shelf stable goods or foods first, like canned goods, and then cold and hot foods last, like milk, right before going to the check out stand.

**Grains**

Choose “whole-grains” often, since these provide us with many nutrients and health benefits. Look for the key word “whole.”

**Fruits**

Have children pick out a new fruit they would like to try. It can be fresh, frozen, canned, dried or 100% juice.

**Vegetables**

Choose vegetables that vary in color: green, orange, yellow, white, purple, red, etc. When able, buy fresh, buy local.

**Milk**

Help your children grow strong bones! Choose 2%, 1% or skim milk for children 2 years old and above. Include yogurt, cottage cheese and other cheeses too.

**Meat and Beans**

Vary your protein! Choose lean meats, poultry, fish as well as nuts, beans and peas! Try to moderate processed meats.

GOAL: Balanced Diet

Adapted from the USDA Team Nutrition Team Up at Home Team Nutrition Activity Book.