

Meals Then and Now

(Grades 4 to 7)

Overview

In this lesson, Grade 4-7 students use inquiry processes (ask questions; gather, interpret and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions) to explore how meals have changed over two or three generations by interviewing their parents and grandparents.

Estimated time: Class time for student presentations plus 20 minutes for wrap-up and discussion.

Learning Outcomes

Students will

- demonstrate an understanding of how cultural background influences eating, and how that may change over time.
- identify the factors that have influenced what and how we eat today compared to what and how we ate in the past.
- evaluate the impact of today's way of life (use of technology, lifestyles, work schedules, etc.) on family meals.
- problem-solve today's mealtime challenges.
- practice interviewing and presentation skills.

Materials

- Student worksheet "[Meals then and now](#)"
- Cookbooks or recipe collection
- [Better Together parent handout](#)
- [Better Together bookmarks](#), available free from BC Dairy Association

Procedures

Learning Activity 1: Interview Parents and Grandparents

- a. Before discussing family meals in the classroom, students will gather information from their parents and grandparents using the student worksheet "Meals Then and Now". Neighbours or family friends can easily serve as surrogate grandparents. Parents can include step-parents, foster parents, guardians or another significant adult of that generation.

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Learning Activity 2: Prepare a Class Report

Students will prepare a brief presentation summarizing the key findings from their family member interviews. Students can report on the following:

- What are the main differences?
- Why are there differences?

Learning Activity 3: Discuss Family Meals

a. Ask students the following questions:

- How often did your parents/grandparents eat together as a family?
- Did your grandparents eat something your family probably wouldn't eat now? Why not?
- Do you have a meal on your family's list that your grandparents would not have eaten? Why not?
- Are there food traditions that your parents or grandparents used to observe that they no longer practice?
- Are there food traditions related to your family's cultural background?
- How was the meal prepared then? How is the meal prepared now (e.g. who cooks it, do all family members help, how is it cooked, how long does it take, etc...)?
- What happened while they were eating? Did they eat while doing other activities? How about now? Do you feel distracted by other activities while you are eating? What are some ways to reduce distractions during meal time?
- What do you think is the main difference between the three meals you have listed? What do you think caused meals to change?

b. Ask students to reflect on what, how and when they can help at home with making meals:

- What could you do to help out at breakfast or dinner?
- Are there any dishes you know how to prepare? Is there something you would like to learn how to cook? What tasks would you like to help with?
- Would you like to help plan or shop for meals? What tasks would you like to help with?
- Which day of the week might be the best day to start? (e.g. weekends might be better than busy weekdays).

c. Students can write a letter to their parents to let them know about how they might like to help out at mealtime.

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Extension

- For further exploration, students may wish to compare several cultural backgrounds. For example, instead of comparing three generations, students can interview newcomers and compare meals in their country of origin with meals eaten in Canada. Connect with a local community organization that supports newcomers, and be sure to share final reports back with the organization and the interviewees.

More information for Teachers

Curriculum Links

This lesson supports Big Ideas and Learning Standards in the Physical and Health Education [BC curriculum](#) and can also link to other subject areas.

Better Together BC
bettertogetherbc.ca

Background

Several factors have influenced what we eat and how we have meals, compared to what and how past generations had meals (eg, immigration, time available, the availability of food, technology, work schedules, etc.). Current data about Canadian eating habits reveal some of the challenges to healthy eating.

Meals and meal preparation:

- In 2015, the average time Canadians spent eating was 91 minutes (1), up from 79 minutes in 2010 (2). The average meal takes 44 minutes, an increase from previous surveys (1).
- Despite this, skipping meals is more common; Canadians eat an average of 2 meals per day (1). BC adults are most likely to skip breakfast than any other province (3). Among BC youth (12-18 years), fewer than 4 in 10 students (37%) always ate three meals a day on school days, and females were more likely to skip meals than males (4).
- Snacking has increasingly replaced meals, and BC residents were the most likely to snack throughout the day (42% vs Canadian average of 20%) (3).
- A greater proportion of men (age 25-54) were involved in food preparation in 2015 compared to 1986 (55.4%, up from 30.6%) (5). In two parent households, the percentage of total food preparation performed by fathers more than doubled over that same time period (from 14% to 35%) (6). Family structure in Canada is more diverse than ever (7).

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- Canadian data also show that eating outside the home happens more often than in the past—54% of Canadians eat out once per week or more. The two main reasons for eating out are socializing (52%) and convenience (40%) (8).

Distracted eating:

- In 2015, almost 6 out of 10 Canadians sometimes ate while distracted by another activity, and a full 10% of Canadians eat only while doing something else (1). The most common distracting activities were using technology (53%) and watching TV (33%) (1).

Eating with others:

- In 2015, 30% of Canadians ate all their meals alone, even among people who lived with their partner (1). Among people with children 0-15 years, 27% of parents ate two or more meals with their children, 39% ate only one meal with their children, and 34% did not eat a meal with their children on the survey day (1).
- As children get older, eating meals together becomes more difficult.

Students can help their families meet the challenges they are currently experiencing with meals (they can help plan and prepare meals, set the table, etc.)

Health Canada addresses many of these eating trends directly in the Canada's Food Guide (2019), because [healthy eating is more than the foods we eat](#).

Want to do more nutrition education with your class?

Explore our other [lesson plans](#) or book a [free 1-hour workshop](#).

References:

1. [2018 Infographic](#): data from Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2015
2. Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2010
3. [S.Charlesbois, S.Somogyi and S.Kirk](#). Disintegration of food habits... 2017
4. [McCreary Centre Society](#), Results of the 2018 Adolescent Health Survey
5. [2017 Report](#): data from Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1986 and 2015
6. [2018 Report](#): data from Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1986 and 2015
7. [Family Day 2019 and the Diversity of Families in Canada](#), Statistics Canada
8. [2019 Infographic](#): data from Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2016