

Media-Smart Youth

Eat, Think, and Be Active!

Through media awareness and media production, Media-Smart Youth motivates young people to think about nutrition and physical activity and helps them become aware of the connections between media and their health.

★ What is the Media-Smart Youth program?

Media-Smart Youth: Eat, Think, and Be Active![®] is an interactive after-school education program that focuses on building skills in media analysis and media production to help young people ages 11 to 13 understand the complex media world around them and how it can influence their health—especially in regard to nutrition and physical activity. The *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), a part of the National Institutes of Health within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, created Media-Smart Youth to help empower young people to think critically about media and make thoughtful decisions about nutrition and physical activity.

★ Why do we need Media-Smart Youth?

Every day, young people actively engage with the media world around them. Today's media world has expanded beyond the traditional forms, such as television, radio, and movies, to include video games, social networking sites, and online videos—all constantly accessible on mobile platforms, such as cell phones. A large-scale national survey found that, in the United States, youth ages 11 to 14 spend an average of 8 hours and 40 minutes each day using media.¹ Through this exposure, young people encounter a barrage of marketing and advertising messages. Depending on their age, children are exposed to between 14,000 and 30,000 ads on TV alone per year. The majority of the advertisements they view are for food, primarily candy, cereal, and fast food.²

Rising use of media, which is tied to an increasingly sedentary lifestyle, and exposure to marketing messages for less nutritious food have combined to contribute to rising rates of childhood overweight and obesity. According to a 2010 study, about one-third of American children and adolescents ages 2 to 19 are overweight or obese and many more young people are at risk.³ Too often, children are consuming too many calories while not getting enough of certain nutrients, including calcium, vitamin D, and fiber. Nationwide, fewer than one-third of all children ages 6 to 17 engage in vigorous physical activity.⁴

In response to these trends, several federal agencies have developed programs to help young people make choices that reinforce healthy behaviors, including being physically active and eating nutritious foods. Media-Smart Youth is part of those efforts.






U.S. Department of
Health and Human Services
National Institutes of Health
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What do youth do in the Media-Smart Youth program?

Through 10 structured lessons and numerous helpful resources, young people become media-savvy by doing fun, hands-on activities.

The curriculum focuses on four key areas:

- **Media awareness:** Using the 6 Media Questions, young people learn to analyze and recognize techniques that media use to get their attention, and to evaluate obvious and subtle media messages for accuracy and for consistency with their ideas about being healthy. 
- **Media production:** Youth express what they learn by creating a *Mini-Production*, in which they develop their own media messages. The *Big Production*, the program's culminating project, enables youth to create media products that promote healthy nutrition and physical activity to their peers.
- **Nutrition:** A variety of activities encourages youth to choose vegetables and fruits, whole grains, and calcium-rich foods, and to reduce their consumption of solid fats and added sugars. Lessons also encourage youth to be thoughtful when choosing snacks and include a *Snack Break* when youth enjoy nutritious foods they may not have tried before. 
- **Physical activity:** Participants learn the importance of daily physical activity in promoting health and develop strategies for becoming more active in their daily lives. Physical activity, they discover, is anything that gets their bodies moving, including walking the dog, dancing, or helping carry groceries. A 10-minute *Action Break* during each lesson engages youth in a fun physical activity. 

Each Media-Smart Youth Kit includes:

- The **Facilitator's Guide**, outlining the 10-lesson after-school curriculum and the *Big Production*.
- A **DVD** with segments to supplement the lessons and provide an overview of the program for adult facilitators and youth participants.
- A **poster** of the 6 Media Questions that youth learn to ask.

References

- ¹ Foehr, U. G., Rideout, V. J., & Roberts, D. F. (2010). *Generation M²: Media in the Lives of 8- to 18-Year-Olds*. Menlo Park, CA: Kaiser Family Foundation.
- ² Kaiser Family Foundation. (2007). *Food for Thought: Television Food Advertising to Children in the United States*. Retrieved February 22, 2012, from <http://www.kff.org/entmedia/upload/7618ES.pdf>.
- ³ Ogden, C. L., Carroll, M. D., Curtin, L. R., & Lamb, M. M. (2010). Prevalence of High Body Mass Index in US Children and Adolescents, 2007-2008. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 303(3), 242-249. Retrieved May 30, 2012, from <http://jama.ama-assn.org/content/303/3/242.full#T2>.
- ⁴ Trust for America's Health and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. (2009). *F as in Fat: How Obesity Policies Are Failing in America, 2009*. Princeton, NJ: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.
- ⁵ Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, NIH, HHS. (2009). *Report on the Evaluation of the Media-Smart Youth Curriculum*. Retrieved October 12, 2012, from https://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/pubs/documents/msy_evaluation_report_final.pdf. Media-Smart Youth Program Evaluation Fact Sheet. Retrieved October 12, 2012, from https://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/pubs/documents/20090219-MSY_FactSheet.pdf.

★ What are the goals of Media-Smart Youth?

Media-Smart Youth is designed to empower young people to:

- Become aware of—and think critically about—media's role in influencing their nutrition and physical activity choices.
- Build skills that help them make informed decisions about being physically active and eating nutritious food in daily life.
- Establish healthy habits that will last into adulthood.
- Learn about media and create their own media products to educate their peers.

★ What do we mean by “media?”

The term “media” refers to all the many ways people express ideas and convey information. Television, radio, computers, cell phones, newspapers, books, magazines, billboards, music, theater, posters, letters, and the Internet are all examples of media. More recent trends that have transformed the traditional media world include cell phone cameras and mobile texts, social networking and video sharing sites, and blogs and microblogs (blogs with very short posts, like Twitter accounts). These new media share two constants: they are always changing, and they are highly influential, especially in the lives of young people. Recognizing the ever-evolving nature of new media, Media-Smart Youth discusses media forms in general, allowing facilitators and youth to bring in specific types of media relevant to their experiences.

★ How was Media-Smart Youth developed and evaluated?

Media-Smart Youth went through a thoughtful and deliberate development process, with extensive review and testing. The initial draft of the curriculum was pilot-tested, extensively revised, pilot-tested again, and further refined. This development process resulted in the first release of the curriculum in October 2005.

Since then, schools and youth-serving organizations have carried out Media-Smart Youth across the country. The NICHD conducted a rigorous outcome evaluation, involving 10 matched pairs of organizations, to make sure the curriculum was on target and effective. Results showed that youth who participated in Media-Smart Youth had a statistically significant greater increase in knowledge about curriculum topics than did nonparticipating youth. In addition, participating youth expressed more intentions to make positive nutrition and physical activity behavior changes than did nonparticipating youth.⁵

★ How has Media-Smart Youth evolved?

In light of today's fast-changing media environment and updates to key nutrition and physical activity guidelines, the NICHD decided the time was right to update the Media-Smart Youth curriculum.

The updated second edition retains all the elements that made the first edition successful and includes a few new features, such as added discussions about digital and new media, information that reflects the latest federal nutrition and physical activity guidelines, new information for parents and guardians, and an expanded Media-Smart Youth website.

★ How can I learn more about Media-Smart Youth?

For more information or to order free copies of the Media-Smart Youth after-school program materials, contact:

NICHD Information Resource Center

Mail: P.O. Box 3006, Rockville, MD 20847

Phone: 1-800-370-2943 (TTY: 1-888-320-6942)

Fax: 1-866-760-5947

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