Points to Ponder

Functional Foods

Reflection Questions/Activities

Teachers: These questions/activities are designed to be used in the classroom to stimulate discussion with students. Some questions may be more appropriate for older students.

Ask students:

1. What are functional foods?
   - Functional foods or beverages provide additional health benefits that may reduce disease risk and promote optimal health.

2. Which foods that they eat would be considered functional. Examples might include:
   - Many fruits and vegetables
   - Calcium-fortified orange juice
   - Enriched bread
   - Oats (lower cholesterol)
   - Fatty fish (omega-3 fatty acids)
   - Margarines with plant stanols
   - Special foods for allergies or health conditions

3. What things might be important to consider when evaluating functional foods or deciding to use a functional food?
   - Does it work?
   - How much does it contain?
   - Is it safe?
   - Is it healthy?
   - Read Nutrition Facts label carefully

4. List ways you can eat more functional foods.
   - Eat a variety of foods with functional benefits on a regular basis.
   - Choose foods from all food groups.

Classroom challenge

Challenge students to start reading food labels. Ask students to bring packages or labels that make certain health claims to share with the class.

- What types of claims are found on the labels?
- Have students divide into groups to research information about functional foods and health claims. Ask the groups to present their research to the class.

Build a functional food wall. Make a wall display using labels from functional foods. Group foods together in different ways (enriched foods, modified foods, health claims, etc.).
What are functional foods?

Americans want to be healthy and are looking for foods that will help achieve that goal. Functional foods provide additional health benefits beyond basic nutrition. They may reduce disease risk and/or promote good health.

Types of functional foods

**Conventional foods**
Unmodified whole foods, including fruits, nuts and vegetables

**Modified foods**
Modified through fortification, enrichment or enhancement, such as calcium-fortified orange juice, folate-enriched bread, margarines with plant stanols or sterol esters

**Medical foods**
Used under physician supervision for a specific medical condition, for example special dietary formulas for diabetes or liver conditions

**Foods for special dietary use**
Used for specific conditions, such as infant formulas, allergies, gluten free and lactose free

Where do I find functional foods?

- Phytonutrients
- Dietary fiber
- Fatty acids
- Vitamins
- Minerals
- Plant stanols/sterols
- Prebiotics
- Probiotics

What are some benefits of functional foods?

- Fruits, vegetables and grains have phytonutrients that may reduce the risk of certain diseases.
- Oats and soy protein may help lower cholesterol.
- Fatty fish contain omega-3 fatty acids, which may lower risk of heart disease.
- Dairy foods may help protect against high blood pressure and colon cancer, and may help with weight control.
Currently, there are 14 approved health claims allowed on food labels. Some of these health claims include:
- Calcium for the reduced risk of osteoporosis
- Low sodium for reduced risk of high blood pressure
- Low dietary fat for reduced risk of cancer
- Low saturated fat and cholesterol for reduced risk of heart disease
- Fiber for reduced risk of some types of cancer
- Fruits, vegetables and grain products high in soluble fiber for reduced risk of heart disease
- Sugar alcohols for reduced risk of cavities

How can I eat more functional foods?
- Eat a variety of foods with functional benefits on a regular basis.
- Try a yogurt smoothie with fruit and wheat bran added.
- Make baked sweet potatoes.
- Top oatmeal with berries.
- Create a snack mix made with nuts and dried fruit.
- Add canned salmon to a salad or have with whole-grain crackers for a snack.
- Try soy-based products like dried soy nuts or soy butter.
- Choose foods from all food groups.
- Include whole grains, fruits, vegetables, fish, lean meats, poultry and low-fat dairy products.

Functional food basics
Functional foods play a role in good health when combined with balanced food choices and physical activity. More research is needed to understand the full potential of functional foods.
Don’t assume all functional foods are healthy — read food labels carefully to determine if a functional food is the right choice for you. Enjoy nature’s functional foods — fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, fatty fish and low-fat milk and yogurt.
Functional Foods

References


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For more information, call MU Extension’s Show Me Nutrition line at 1-888-515-0016.

Running out of money for food?
Contact your local food stamp office or go online to dss.mo.gov/fsd/fsamp/