

We Try Wednesday”: A Cafeteria-Based Exposure Intervention to Promote Fruit and Vegetable Acceptance Among Early Childhood Students

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Abstract

Early childhood is a critical stage for developing healthy eating behaviors, yet many children remain hesitant to try unfamiliar fruits and vegetables. The *We Try Wednesday* program was designed as a weekly cafeteria-based intervention aimed at increasing willingness to try new produce among Pre-K to Grade 2 students in a private elementary school in Kuwait. Over 12 weeks, students were introduced to a new fruit or vegetable during lunch, such as starfruit, papaya, or dragon fruit. Nutrition educators announced fun facts and health benefits via microphone and encouraged tasting. Semi-structured interviews with students revealed peer modeling, curiosity, and multisensory engagement as primary motivators. Children often cited trying foods because classmates or teachers did, or because of tactile and visual interest. The social, dynamic cafeteria setting positively influenced participation. Findings suggest that interactive, exposure-based programs like *We Try Wednesday* can effectively enhance fruit and vegetable acceptance through peer influence, engaging storytelling, and hands-on exploration within familiar school environments.

Keywords: child nutrition; picky eating; school cafeteria; food acceptance; school-based intervention