



Dry and Delicious

NUTRITION ACTIVITY #9

Summary:

Groups will make dehydrated fruit and veggie snacks.

Why Do This?

The dehydrated foods the groups will make are nutritious enjoyable snacks. This activity provides group members with one more nutritious way to snack and another way to eat more fruits and vegetables as well as familiarizing them with the dehydration process.

Some Helpful Information:

People have been dehydrating foods since the beginning of time. Dried berries and other fruits and vegetables provided much needed vitamins to people who had no other means to preserve food. We can benefit from dehydrating foods today as well. Dried foods are lightweight, don't take up much room, and require no refrigeration. This means they can be stored well and are ideal as lightweight food to take on hikes or put in lunches. Dried food makes a great every day snack as well.

Dehydrating means to remove the water. We will prepare foods by slicing 1/8 inch thick slices so they will dry relatively quickly. Vegetables that have a long cooking time like carrots, parsnips, turnips and squash should be blanched. To blanch dunk the cut up vegetables in boiling water for 5 minutes. Blanching reduces spoiling, preserves color and makes produce dry quicker. Vegetables that have a short cooking time like zucchini, beets, cucumber, peppers, onions, mushrooms or tomatoes don't require blanching.

If foods are dried in the oven you need to make sure trays are small enough to allow air circulation and that the temperature never gets above 140 degrees. Temperatures that are too high will destroy nutrients and make the food tough. It is possible to dry foods with the sun, but temperatures need to be consistently above 100 degrees with low humidity. Food must be protected to keep insects off. Take trays in at night. It can take about 4 days to get some foods completely dry. Using a food dehydrator is the easiest. It will hold a constant temperature, and drying time for veggies is about 7-9 hours. Veggies are done when they are tough to brittle. Fruit is done when it is leathery and pliable with no sticky or damp spots.

Dried vegetables are best when used within six months as they become tough with long term storage. Fruit keeps longer but flavor and texture both deteriorate with time. Dried foods can be eaten as a snack. If you want to add vegetables to a recipe you can rehydrate foods. Soak the dried food in an equal amount of water. For example, soak one cup of dried carrots in one cup of water. If you use warm or hot water they will rehydrate more quickly. Don't soak for more than 2 hours or they may spoil. The rehydrated veggies can be served with a sauce or added to a recipe like a soup or sauce.

Time:

1 hour to prepare; up to 9 hours in the dehydrator or oven, 1/2 hour next meeting

Materials:

fresh firm fruits such as apples, pears, nectarines, persimmons, papaya, bananas, plums
fresh veggies such as cucumbers, zucchini, tomato, mushrooms, peppers, beets, parsnips, carrots
cookie sheets or trays
oil or heavy plastic wrap
sharp knives and/or food processor with slicing blade
cutting boards
bowls
dehydrator or oven
masking tape and pen

SECOND WEEK: HOT water, cups, and forks for rehydrating

Preparation:

1. Decide if you will oven dry or use a dehydrator. (The dehydrator will hold at 140 degrees; it may be difficult to keep the oven temperature that low.)
2. Select foods that are ripe but firm enough to slice easily. If using a food processor with slicer, try it out to be sure that fruits make it through the processor slicer without getting pureed.
3. Figure out how much room you have in your oven or dehydrator. You may want to do two batches of dehydrating. Fill an appropriate number of trays. This will determine how much food to buy, how many trays to provide, and how many groups to break into.

Step by Step:

1. Ask everyone if they were going on a long trip and they had to carry all their fruits and vegetables, how they could do that. Ask if they have eaten dried foods or fruits. Do they know how astronauts and mountain climbers carry their fruits and vegetables? Discuss with them that dehydrating is the removal of water. There is a lot of water in fruits and vegetables. You can bring an instant soup to look at and discuss.
2. Break into groups. Supply each group with a food (or foods) and the materials they need to prepare them.
3. They must all clean, core and/or peel depending on the food they have chosen or been given. Have them slice thin (1/8 inch) or use food processor to do slicing. Those too young to slice can lay foods out evenly on the trays. Each group should put their name on a piece of tape and put it on their tray(s.)
4. Dry the foods. Bag them or place them in airtight containers with the groups' names fastened to the containers. Bring them to the next group meeting.

NEXT MEETING:

5. Have everyone find the foods they prepared and taste them. Have everyone taste everyone else's dried foods.
6. Discuss which ones they like the best and why.
7. Try rehydrating some of each type with HOT water and taste test them again. Talk about using some rehydrated foods to cook with.

Extensions:

- Make an instant soup with instant rice, rehydrated veggies and hot bouillon.
- Have everyone think up a way to use the dried or rehydrated food. Have a potluck with their ideas.
- Make fruit leather with applesauce. Spread it 1/4 inch deep on thick plastic draped on a tray. Dry in dehydrator following directions or in an oven set as low as possible. Let steam out occasionally and rotate trays. It's done when no longer sticky and will roll up and hold together.

Fruit Leather is a popular dried fruit treat. It requires cooking and more equipment. Food dryers have special trays for fruit leathers. Pour on special plastic tray and dry in dehydrator, following temperature directions provided with machine. If you are drying in an oven you'll need to lay plastic over a cookie sheet and oil the surface of the plastic. Here is a recipe:

FRUIT LEATHER

For each cup of cleaned, peeled and pared fruit (apples, plums, berries, peaches...) add about one and one-half tablespoons of sugar. The amount of sugar varies with how tart your fruit is and your taste. Cook the fruit and sugar together. Cook just long enough to get the fruit very soft. Puree the mixture. Spread a thin coat on oiled plastic wrap. Be sure it's less than one-quarter inch thick, otherwise it won't dry in the middle. Dry as for dried fruit. Leathers usually take about 3 hours at 135 degrees F. When the surface doesn't feel sticky even when your finger is rubbed over it, leather is done. It will be pliable and a bit stretchy. The finished product can be rolled up on the plastic and refrigerated.

