

# Pre-schoolers to learn about nutrition beyond classroom

New programme to benefit over 1,000 kids from My First Skool by the end of the year

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Some pre-schoolers here are learning how to eat healthy meals, not only in school, but also at home.

Under a new programme called Start Strong, Stay Strong, which began in September, pre-schoolers from NTUC First Campus' My First Skool are being taught about the different food groups, how to read nutrition labels and ways to encourage their families to make better food choices.

The programme will also allow the children to test their classroom knowledge on field trips to an actual FairPrice supermarket.

Developed by FairPrice Group and FairPrice Foundation with experts from My First Skool, environmental social enterprise Terra SG and KK Women's and Children's Hospital, it is set to benefit more than 1,000 pre-school children from My First Skool by the end of 2024, FairPrice Group said on Sept 26.

By 2025, it will be conducted for about 20,000 children across the network of 160 My First Skool campuses in Singapore. It will also eventually be offered to other operators' pre-schools.

The programme aims to supplement pre-schoolers' day-to-day learning about nutrition with skills to make informed food choices, said Ms Thian Ai Ling, My First Skool's general manager.

"We (found that we) may need to speak to our children a little bit more about nutrition, maybe take them grocery shopping and eat together as a family so that we can talk about food," she added.

According to a survey conducted by FairPrice Group earlier in the year, only one in four Singaporeans actually understands the nuances of what makes up a balanced and nutritious diet, even though four in five here are aware of the need to eat healthy meals.

The findings of the survey, which will be released in October, are a key reason for launching the Start Strong, Stay Strong programme, said Mr Vipul Chawla, group chief executive of FairPrice Group, at a launch event on Sept 26.

He also noted the importance of having a robust understanding of nutrition from a young age.

"Through our daily engagement with customers, we've learnt just how important health and nutrition are to Singaporeans, and especially young families looking to give their kids a strong head start in life," he said.

"Through the initiative, we want to help shape a generation of healthy, informed and responsible individuals who can build a better future for themselves, their families and the nation, one meal at a time."

Most of the My First Skool branches are already in the Healthy Meals in Pre-schools Programme, an initiative by the Health Promotion Board stipulating that meals served in pre-schools must incorporate food from the four main food groups: whole grains, lean meat, vegetables and fruits.

Besides developing resources that early childhood educators can use, My First Skool also plans to involve parents so that the knowledge and observance of a well-balanced diet become a part of the children's daily lives.

"Hopefully, over time, it becomes a habit for the families when they go grocery shopping... if our children are there learning to read labels, comparing whole grain (food items) or brown sugar versus white sugar, they are picking up life skills as well," Ms Thian said.

The curriculum comprises three components.

The first is an interactive classroom session featuring games and

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group exercises that teach children about the different food groups and essential nutrients that make up a

balanced diet.

Next, there is a take-home exercise for the children, containing instructions for home activities that encourage the exploration of their family's eating habits and dietary needs, guiding them to make informed nutrition choices.



The Start Strong, Stay Strong programme, which began in September, will allow pre-schoolers from My First Skool to test their classroom knowledge on field trips to an actual FairPrice supermarket. PHOTO: FAIRPRICE GROUP


The last component involves the application of their classroom knowledge in the form of an excursion to a FairPrice supermarket for a hands-on learning session.

At the end of the programme, each child will receive a bundle containing fresh fruits, healthy breakfast essentials and a recipe pack for nutritious meals such as banana pancakes and sweet corn chicken patties.

The content will be adjusted according to the age of the child, Ms Thian said.


"With these additional resources and getting the children involved, the hope is that it becomes a habit (to do things like) reading labels... we don't want it to just be a school programme, (and they) go back to their habits once they're at home," she added.

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