Schools to teach how to be healthy and wise

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It is one of those things most parents struggle with: getting children to eat all their vegetables and fruits, and ensuring they have a balanced diet. The daily battle at home may now get some help from school. Good nutrition may be included as part of the syllabus, even as an increasing number of educational institutions are focusing on healthy eating.

Following a roundtable on food safety and nutrition held in New Delhi earlier this month, Commissioner of Food Safety P. Amudha said that a ‘Yellow Book’, brought out by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), will be sent to the School Education Department in order for it to be reviewed and incorporated in the syllabus. The new, revamped syllabus for State board schools to be implemented this academic year has some health information, she said. “Any gaps and aspects that are missing will be adopted using these books,” she said.

Content from ‘Yellow Book’ by Central agency on nutrition to be incorporated into school syllabus to deal with issues such as obesity
The interactive, illustrated books, in three parts for different age groups (between 4 and 17), are aimed at inculcating wholesome food habits, personal hygiene and safe food choices. The FSSAI had urged States to ask their school education boards to use the books.

As a part of the suggested roll-out plan of the Safe and Nutritious Food at school initiative of the (FSSAI), the appointment of school health and wellness coordinators has been suggested as well.

The coordinators, who can be either teachers or students, will be provided with a comprehensive guidance kit which will include the Yellow Book.

**Balanced diet**

The revamped State board syllabus already includes physical and health education for Classes I to X, said T. Udhayachandran, Additional Secretary, School Education. “We have specific activities, including sports, calisthenics, breathing exercises and healthy and safe habits as a part of the curriculum for each class. The students will also be spoken to about traditional foods such as millets with regard to nutrition,” he said.

A balanced diet is key to good health, says Padmasani Venkat Ramanan, professor of paediatric medicine at Sri Ramachandra University. Among pre-adolescents, habitual constipation and iron-deficiency anaemia are some of the health issues that come up when there is an unhealthy diet. With adolescents, in addition to these, obesity is a growing problem, she said. “In the current-day scenario, there is a tendency to use pre-packaged meals and eat out a lot. This is unhealthy both because more calories are consumed and such food is deficient in essential nutrients and fibre that comes from fruits and vegetables,” she said.

It is better to teach children about healthy eating from a young age so that habits can be formed — it is difficult to change habits later, said Bhuvaneshwari Shankar, head, department of dietetics, Apollo Hospitals Group. Unbalanced diets can lead to lifelong health issues, said Dr. Bhuvaneshwari.