The adage, old habits die hard, is the hope of a nutrition program hosted by Anne Gross, an Education Program Assistant with OSU Extension in Josephine County. This fall, 220 6th graders zoomed into 8 special sessions to learn to Exercise Your Options. The curriculum is designed to help students understand the impact of their food choices, empower them to engage in physical activity, and guide them toward healthy routines.

By partnering with health and physical education teachers at North Middle School, Anne was able to join the virtual classroom and teach students about nutrition. Each lesson focused on a different component of a healthy lifestyle, such as nutrients in common foods, basic My Plate guidelines, external influences affecting food choices, the benefits and types of physical activity, and how to overcome obstacles. Students amped up their knowledge about the 5 food groups and made a few shocking discoveries – spoiler alert: cream cheese is an “extra” with little nutritional value.

So just how do you convince headstrong 6th graders to eat vegetables and whole grains? Anne attacks this head-on, “I tell the kids the first day that I am not here to tell them what to eat and what not to eat.” The aim is to give them all the information and let them make choices that work for them. The more students know about food and exercise, the more likely they will be to make those healthy choices now, and for years to come.

Exercise Your Options utilized live instruction coupled with recorded segments and online fillable student workbooks to guide the lessons. Not surprisingly, Zoom’s chat feature was a hit with students who posted questions and interacted with Anne and the other teachers in real time. In the ever-changing COVID world, Zoom and Canvas provided the online platforms necessary to engage students, but now it’s up to them to create the healthy habits that will hopefully last a lifetime.

By Cheryl Leitch for OSU Extension

OSU Extension Service prohibits discrimination in all its programs, services, activities, and materials.