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Evaluating health products

Strand

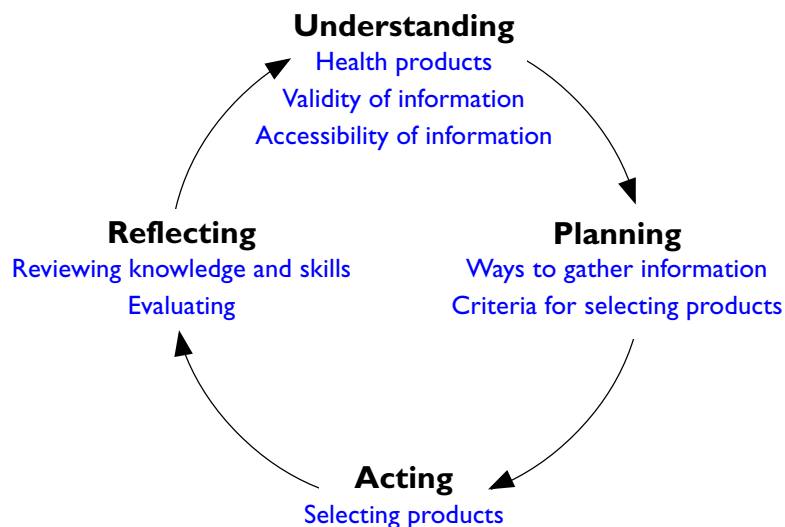
Promoting the Health of Individuals and Communities

Purpose

Students explore the importance of accessing valid health information in enabling them to make informed decisions about health products. They generate criteria and identify other actions they can take to assist them to evaluate claims and information about health products.

Overview of activities

Activities in this module are based on a learner-centred approach with an emphasis on decision making and problem solving. As the following diagram shows, activities are sequenced in **understanding**, **planning**, **acting** and **reflecting** phases.



Core learning outcome

This module focuses on the following core learning outcome from the Years 1 to 10 Health and Physical Education Syllabus.

Promoting the Health of Individuals and Communities

4.4 Students justify the selection of health products and services that best meet their health needs.

Core content

Promoting the Health of Individuals and Communities

This module incorporates the following core content from the syllabus:

- issues related to the selection of health products, services and information, including health needs of self and others, access and availability, effective use and reliability of information.

Assessment strategy

Promoting the Health of Individuals and Communities 4.4

The following are examples of assessment tasks that provide opportunities for students to demonstrate the core learning outcome identified in this module.

- **Students compare the information and claims made on two similar products. They evaluate each product to judge whether one might better suit their health needs and justify their decision.**
 - Can the student explain his or her health needs?
 - Can the student identify available products that can meet those health needs?
 - Can the student evaluate products to determine which best meet his or her health needs?
 - Can the student justify his or her selection of health products?
 - Can the student justify his or her selection of health products in terms of current health needs?

Background information

Health products

Because students become consumers of a range of health products and services throughout their lives, it is important that they gain the knowledge and skills to choose those that will best meet their health needs. Claims about health products can be persuasive and misleading. This module has been designed so that students can learn to evaluate information about health products, especially those that target the youth market. Although this module has been developed with a focus on the 'health product' dimension of the core learning outcome, it can also be adapted to encompass the 'health service' dimension.

Terminology

Activities in this module involve use of the following language in the context of Health and Physical Education:

access	health information	reliability
availability	health products	right to be informed
claims	health rights	scientifically developed
consumer	invalid	social justice
criteria	misleading	technical information
effectiveness	persuasive	valid, validity

School authority policies

Teachers need to be aware of and observe school authority policies that may be relevant to this module, particularly policies relating to sensitive issues.

Social justice principles

This module provides opportunities for students to increase their understanding and appreciation of supportive environments and diversity. It includes activities that encourage students to:

- compare their use of health products with that of their peers and recognise that individuals use different products to meet their needs;
- consider the accessibility of valid information about health products for all individuals, regardless of age, background, location or abilities, and to propose any changes that will provide all groups with better access to information so that informed selections can be made.

Students with disabilities or learning difficulties may require some activities to be modified to optimise both their participation and their ability to demonstrate the outcomes. Teachers should consult with parents/carers and specialist support staff to determine whether modification is necessary.

Support materials and references

Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, Queensland 1996, *Warranties and Refunds*, Canberra.

Australian Competition and Consumer Commission.
Available URL: <http://www.accc.gov.au> (accessed January 2000).

Davis, D., Butler, T. & Hasker, L. 1996, *Health and Physical Education, Book 1*, Macmillan Education Australia, South Melbourne.

Doherty, F., Stallard, R., Stuart, R. & Hayllar, B. 1995, *Life Management Studies 1*, Heinemann Education, Port Melbourne.

Lockhart, Aileen 1994, *Food Science and Technology*, The Jacaranda Press, Milton, Queensland.

Meeks, L. & Heit, P. 1991, *Health: A Wellness Approach*, teacher edn, Merrill Publishing Company, Columbus, Ohio.

Queensland Government 1999, *Office of Fair Trading — Department of Equity and Fair Trading*. Available URL: <http://www.consumer.qld.gov.au> (accessed January 2000).

Organisations

Australian Competition and Consumer Commission

PO Box 10048

Adelaide Street Post Office, Q 4000

Tel: (07) 3835 4666

Fax: (07) 3832 0372

Department of Equity and Fair Trading

PO Box 3111

Brisbane, Q 4001

Tel: (07) 3246 1500

Hearing/Speaking Impaired: (07) 3246 1588

Activities

Understanding

HEALTH PRODUCTS

Reviewing knowledge about the range of health products used

► Students list the health products they use to meet their health requirements. They compare their lists with those of their peers to generate a list of products commonly used. They discuss similarities and differences in health product use.

Focus questions could include:

- What products are commonly used among your peer group?
- Are the products used for the same purpose?
- What differences exist in health product use?

Teaching considerations

Be aware that disclosure of health product use may be a sensitive issue for many students, especially those with specific health conditions.

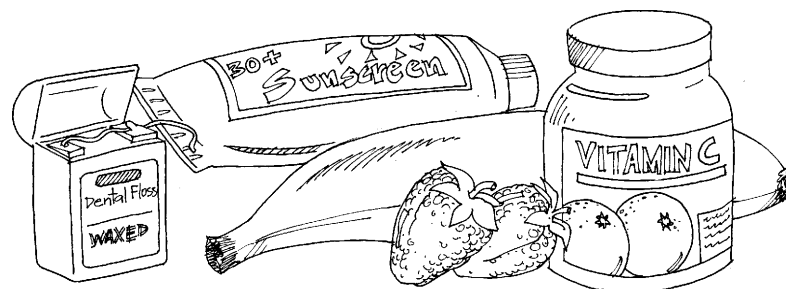
Commonly used products are likely to include sunscreens, acne treatments, cereals, breakfast bars, vitamin supplements, sport shoes, sport drinks, female health products, headache tablets and personal hygiene products — for example, toothpaste, deodorant.

Highlight to students that there will be a wide diversity in the use of specific health products because of people's different needs.

► Students discuss their knowledge about particular products they use.

Focus questions could include:

- What health need(s) do you believe the product meets?
- Does the product meet more than one health need?
- How do you think the product meets this health need?
- What ingredients do you understand the product to contain?
- How beneficial do you believe these ingredients are?
- Are there any side effects from using the product in the short term? Are there any in the long term?



VALIDITY OF INFORMATION

Developing an understanding of the sources that provide health information, the decisions involved in choosing a product and the rights of individuals to obtain valid health information about products

- ▶ Students compile a list of the sources from which they acquired their information about the products discussed in the previous activity.

Teaching consideration

Sources of information for young people are likely to be family and friends, television and radio advertisements and commercials, product labels and directions, health professionals and practitioners, magazines and newspapers, health educators, libraries, health agencies and the Internet.

- ▶ Students discuss what ‘valid’ health information means to them. They compile a list of criteria that could be applied to health information to determine its validity.

Focus questions could include:

- What makes health information ‘valid’ to you? To others your age? To others older and younger?
- What criteria could be developed for determining the validity of health information?
- What factors help determine the validity of health information?
- What do you understand to be the role of valid health information?

Teaching consideration

Students might understand valid health information to be ‘trustworthy’ and ‘reliable’ information about a product that will support their health needs. The source of the health information could be seen to be important.

- ▶ Students rank the list of sources, previously identified, in terms of the likelihood of them providing trustworthy and reliable (valid) health information.

Focus questions could include:

- Which source is perceived to provide the most reliable information? Why?
- Is this source always the most reliable? Why?
- Does the validity of the source of information influence your selection of health products?

Teaching consideration

Highlight to students that the validity of the source of information does affect their selection and use of health products.

- ▶ Students identify the potential problems faced by a consumer who wants to purchase a health product to meet a health need.

Focus questions could include:

- What problems might a consumer face when wanting to purchase a health product — for example, sunscreen?
- What information helps a wise consumer compare brands?

Teaching consideration

Potential problems faced by consumers include selecting from a variety of brands and claims and weighing up varying costs and claims.

- ▶ Students discuss the possible consequences of not having valid health information and acting upon information from unreliable sources.

Focus questions could include:

- Who gains and who loses when information supplied is not valid?
- Who gains and who loses when consumers lack the critical skills to question or challenge information provided?
- What and how do these consumers gain or lose?
- What might be the health consequences of heeding information from an unreliable source?
- What might be the financial consequences of invalid information?

Teaching consideration

Highlight to students that:

- companies stand to gain financially when consumers purchase the product on the basis of a good marketing strategy and without critical analysis of product information;
 - companies also stand to lose financially if consumers take legal action and are successful in proving that their health suffered due to lack of warning or false claims linked to the product.
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ACCESSIBILITY OF INFORMATION

Developing an understanding of the accessibility of valid health product information for all social groups

- ▶ Students discuss people’s rights in accessing valid health information about products and investigate how accessible that information is for various groups. They discuss the ‘right to access’ with various people in their community to ascertain whether all people have equal access to valid health information.

Focus questions could include:

- Do all individuals have access to valid health information? Who is advantaged? Who is disadvantaged? How are individuals advantaged or disadvantaged?
- Should students have a right to access this information?
- Do individuals for whom English is a second language have a right to access this information? Why?

- What problems might individuals for whom English is a second language have in accessing valid health information?
- Do people on limited incomes have the same access to health information as those with higher incomes? Why?
- Do individuals with vision impairment have a right to access this information? Why? How might they access it?
- Do individuals with intellectual impairment have a right to access this information? Why? How might they access it?
- Do individuals living in remote areas have a right to access this information? How might they access it?
- How easy is it for individuals with vision impairment or individuals living in remote areas to access this information? Is this an equitable situation?
- What is needed for individuals for whom English is a second language to access valid health information?
- What is needed for individuals with vision or intellectual impairments and individuals living in remote areas to access valid health information?

Teaching consideration

Highlight to students that, as consumers, everyone, regardless of language, impairment, economic status, ability or location, has a right to access valid health information to enable informed product selections to be made.

Planning

WAYS TO GATHER INFORMATION

Investigating readily available information and actions that can be taken to gather further information about claims or products

► Students examine a range of health products to identify different types of health information available. They examine product labels as well as advertisements and other articles with claims about health products — for example, in magazines, on television, radio and the Internet. In particular, they investigate claims marked on health products that they perceive as targeting their health needs.

Focus questions could include (for each article, label or advertisement):

- What categories of information are provided?
- What technical health information is provided?
- What health claims are made? What claims are made about the product’s ability to meet a particular health need? Who has made these claims? Why? Whose interests are being served?
- Is there a claim that the product has been scientifically developed and tested? What details of this are provided?
- How reliable is the source?
- Is the product validated by another organisation or person? If so, by whom? Is this a reliable source? How do you know it is?
- What ingredients or substances are claimed to be contained in the product? Do you know what these substances are? Are these ingredients environmentally friendly? Are they people friendly?

Teaching consideration

Reinforce the concepts of reliability and validity.

► Students discuss whether having scientific and technical information about a product assists them in making their choice.

Focus questions could include:

- Does it matter if products are not labelled with scientific or technical information?
 - Does it mean a product is safe if it has been scientifically tested?
 - Is a blanket condemnation of products that have been developed non-scientifically warranted?
 - How important is scientific or technical information when you are choosing health products? Why?
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Teaching consideration

Highlight to students that:

- It is possible for scientific results to be manipulated to suit a company's needs, so products may not necessarily be safe if proof is claimed by just one company. Independent testing may not reach the same conclusions.
 - There are many quality products available that have not been scientifically tested.
 - Just because a product has been determined to be a quality health product doesn't necessarily mean that it will best meet the health requirements of all individuals. Health needs vary and different products will suit different individuals.
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► Students identify actions they can take in cases where they have doubts about the reliability and validity of information or require more information about a product and how it meets health needs.

Focus questions could include:

- Where would you go to seek more information?
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Teaching consideration

Organisations to which you may direct students are listed in the 'Support materials and references' section of this module.

CRITERIA FOR SELECTING PRODUCTS

Developing a set of criteria for selecting health products

► Students generate a set of criteria that they and other consumers could use when selecting products to best meet their health needs.

Teaching consideration

Guide students to consider their specific health needs and compare them with claims made about the products they select to meet their needs, the reliability of the sources making the claims, validated support for the products from other reliable sources, and health risks associated with using the products.

Acting

SELECTING PRODUCTS

Applying criteria to evaluate and select health products

► Students compare the information and claims on two similar products. They evaluate whether one product might better suit their health needs and justify their decision. They might also identify other actions that can be taken to ensure that their conclusion is the most satisfactory one.

Focus questions could include:

- Which product best meets your health needs?
- How did you reach this decision?

Reflecting

REVIEWING KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Reflecting on abilities to evaluate the claims of suppliers of health products and to access valid health information

► Students discuss the usefulness of the criteria they developed to evaluate claims, and the likelihood of using the criteria.

Focus questions could include:

- What have you learnt in relation to evaluating information on health product labels and in health product advertisements or other articles making claims about health products?
- Are there some other criteria that also may have been useful?
- What skills do you now have that will enable you to make wise decisions about the use or purchase of health products?
- How useful will your skills be now and in the future in enabling you to evaluate claims about health products?
- How confident are you now about choosing products that promote your health?

- ▶ Students determine their level of confidence in being able to access reliable sources of information.

Focus questions could include:

- How confident would you feel about contacting a supplier or other source to find out further information about a product or to check on the validity of information you have about a product?

EVALUATING	Reflecting upon the teaching-learning process
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- ▶ Students reflect on the strategy they used to examine health information.

Focus questions could include:

- What aspects of the strategy worked well? For example, was examining advertisements and labels on health products helpful?
- What aspects of the strategy did not work well?
- What other strategies could have been used to help you make decisions about health information?

This sourcebook module should be read in conjunction with the following Queensland School Curriculum Council materials:

Years 1 to 10 Health and Physical Education Syllabus

Years 1 to 10 Health and Physical Education Sourcebook: Guidelines

Health and Physical Education Initial In-service Materials

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