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*\*Serial\* Home Economics Education in Japan 4*

This serial focuses on the characteristics and current issues surrounding home economics education in Japan, while also providing a historical perspective.

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## Food & Nutrition Education in Home Economics Education

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home economics education, food & nutrition education, cooking practice, elementary school

### Food & Nutrition Education in School

The act of eating is essential to maintaining life and is an activity shared by everyone all around the world. However, while some people suffer from hunger, other people suffer from lifestyle-related illnesses due to over nutrition. Among the advanced nations, which are in the latter situation, food & nutrition education to improve people's dietary habits has been promoted in various countries as evidenced by the Slow Food movement in Italy, which began in the late 1980s, and classes on taste called "Leçon de Goût" in France, which started in 1990.

Also in Japan, the Basic Law on Shokuiku was enacted in 2005. The Law defines "Shokuiku" as education to acquire knowledge of food and nutrition, as well as the ability choose appropriate foods through various food-related experiences, in order to improve people' ability to practice healthy eating habits (from "What is "Shokuiku (Food Education)"?). The targets of the Law are not only children but citizens of all ages. In this report, "Shokuiku" is described as "food & nutrition education." Unfavorable dietary habits, as evidenced by the fact that the number of people suffering from metabolic syndrome has not decreased, are one of the reasons for the rising healthcare expenditure in Japan. Facing a growing discrepancy between food production such as agriculture and fisheries and food consumption, Japan has an extremely low food self-sufficiency rate, which poses a serious social problem. Filling a gap between production and consumption will decrease CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from transportation and reduce the environmental burden. Furthermore, it will have a positive impact on safety. There are also many things that should be passed down to the next generation, such as local food and the foods eaten at seasonal events.

Based on the Law, various approaches have been taken throughout the country. It is vital for food & nutrition education of children to be provided through integrated efforts among school, family and community, with the school leading the family and the community. Food & nutrition education in school is supposed to be provided through many subjects or activities by all school staffs and teachers under the principal's leadership. In fact, nutrition teachers, home economics teachers and school nurses play the central role in these efforts. Nutrition teachers mainly work on school lunches, and school nurses are involved with children's overall health. As for the subject, home economics classes

spend a number of hours in this field. Indeed, diet has long been one of the main subjects in home economics education.

### Food & Nutrition Education in Home Economics Education

Figure 1 shows a process to learn eating habits in home economics education. In home economics education, students learn which nutrients are necessary for human health and maintenance of life and which food includes such nutrients, as well as the knowledge, skills and techniques related to cooking that make it possible to enjoy eating foods without reducing the nutrient value. Without these cooking skills and techniques, it would be difficult to put the acquired knowledge of nutrients and foods into full practical use. An objective of food & nutrition education in home economics education is enabling students to decide what kinds and volume of food to eat while paying attention to a wide range of issues surrounding foods, including dietary habits, food economy and food culture. Therefore, homemade dishes are not the only thing home economics education recommends. When people do not have enough time, they have an option to use instant foods. Yet, their quality of life can be improved if they have a choice to cook their own meals. There are several reasons why homemade food is praised. For example, processed food and ready-made products tend to taste the same with, too much salt and fat. Another reason is a concern regarding food additives and non-transparent ingredients in processed foods. Also, as can be seen in the phrase “Taste of mom’s cooking”, homemade cooking symbolizes familial ties.

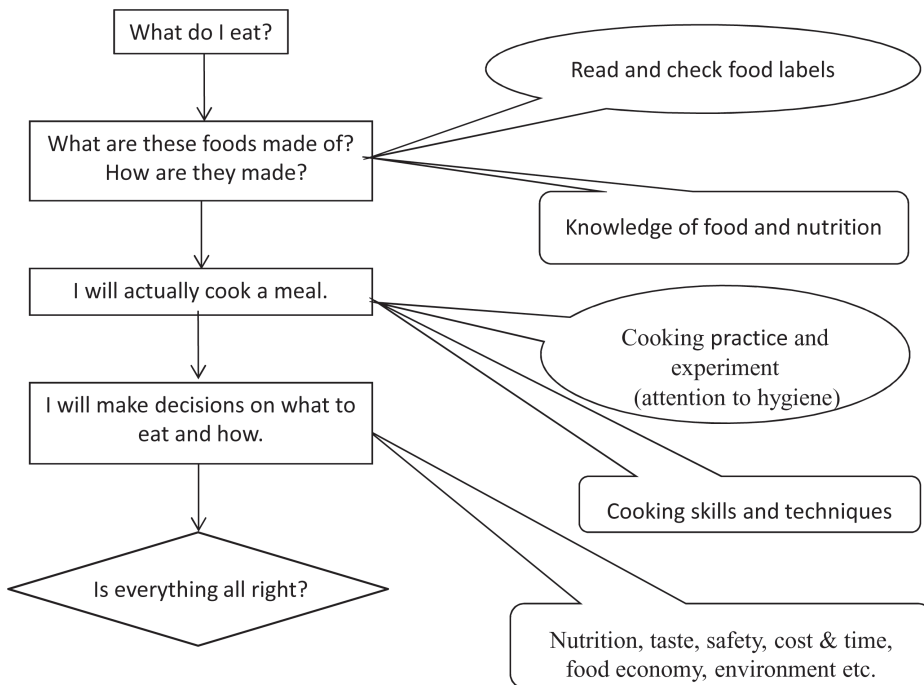


Fig.1 Process to learn eating habits in home economics education

## **Relations between Food & Nutrition Education in Home Economics Education and Other Subjects in Elementary School**

Expansion of opportunities to cook in elementary school has been a great achievement in terms of promoting independence of children in daily living: cooking now takes place not only in home economics classes for upper grades but also at an early stage in life environment studies classes for lower grades as well as comprehensive studies and extracurricular activities for middle and upper grades. However, in order for students to acquire skills and techniques, it is important for them to learn cooking in a step-by-step manner. Furthermore, precious cooking practice time should not be just the mere experience of “cooking” and “eating.” It should also serve as an opportunity for students to gain knowledge of food and cooking and to increase their interest in food.

Therefore, cooking practice should be planned based on cooking skills to learn, such as cutting and heating, and the objective of food & nutrition education in each grade. Table 1 shows cooking skills that should be covered in elementary schools and menus to practice these skills. For upper grades, local dishes are also included based on home economics textbooks. A steamer is used for “cupcakes.” Steaming is a difficult method of heating because one has to be careful to avoid burns due to the high-temperature steam when taking the lid off the pot. Thus, although the current home economics education does not cover this heating method, the author believes that children come to understand the importance of safety by practicing in a step-by-step manner as shown in the table.

Food & nutrition education in school education becomes meaningful when it is conducted based on systematic academic guidance with intelligent recognition. The future food & nutrition education needs to go beyond “making much of experiences” of just cooking and eating.

### References

- Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, “What is “Shokuiku (Food Education)””, <http://www.maff.go.jp/e/pdf/shokuiku.pdf>
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Table 1 Cooking skills to be covered in elementary schools and corresponding menus

Grade	cooking skill Menu	wash foods	measure	select food	processing				cut/peel	heat
					mix	grasp	roll	knead		
lower grades	Steamed or baked sweet potato	◎			(○)					△ steam, bake
	Fruit(banana, kiwi etc.) & yogurt		△	◎balance flavors	◎				◎ experience cutting with knife	
	Vegetable salad(cucumber,mini tomato, lettuce)	○							◎ cut with a kitchen knife greatly	
middle grades	Make Japanese tea									◎boil water
	Rice ball					◎use wrap				△ use rice cooker
	Rolled sandwich (ham & lettuce )	○					◎use wrap			
	Heated-vegetables salad (Broccoli, a carrot, and Asparagus etc. )	○			○ choose commercial dressing.				◎ use peeler or kitchen knife	◎ boil under water
	"Shiratama ko"1) dumpling			◎				◎		○
	Peel fruit								◎ peel using	
upper grades	Vegetable salad	○	○						◎slice	
	Miso soup	○	○		○ choose ingredient				○	◎ boil
	Rice		○							◎ cook rice without rice cooker
	German potato	○	○							◎ boil and stir-fry potatoes
	Spinach seasoned with soy sauce	○	○							◎ boil greens
	Somen2)		○							◎ boil noodles
	Egg dish		○							○
	Stir-fried vegetables	○	○						◎ Various ways of	○
	Cupcake		○		○					○
Box lunch or sandwich	◎apply the skills learned so far/prepare a cooking plan									

◎:Key learning point ○:Learning point △:teacher's work

1)"Shiratama ko" is made from glutinous rice. 2)"somen" is Japanese vermicelli.