

Athena's Adventures in Health Policy

FIND FRIENDLY FOODS



By Ana Rita Gonzalez and Lucila Vignoli

Illustrated by Melina Sugliano

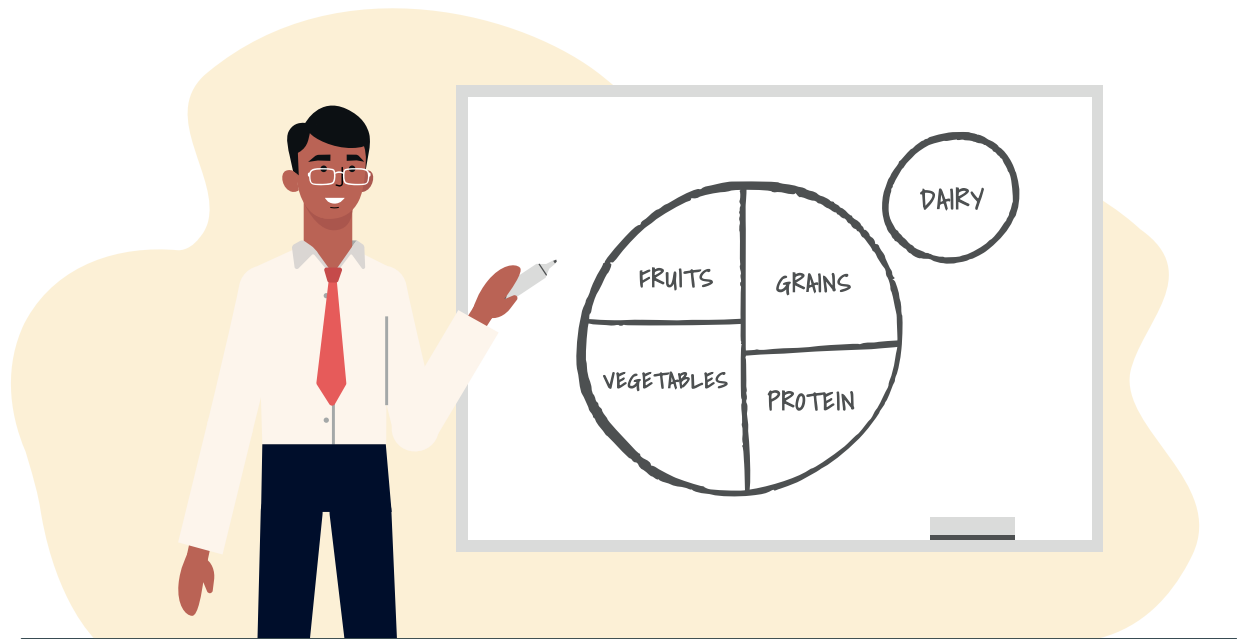
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CHAPTER 1: HEALTHY EATING



It was Friday afternoon. Athena and her classmates squirmed in their seats.

Everyone was ready for the weekend—just one more hour of school!

Before the bell rang, Athena’s teacher, Mr. Gyan, had one more lesson planned.

The class watched as he drew a picture on the whiteboard.

“Does anyone know what this is?” asked Mr. Gyan.

Athena looked at the picture. Mr. Gyan had drawn two circles, a large one and a small one. The large circle was divided into quarters.

Each quarter had a label—fruits, vegetables, grains, and protein.

On the small circle, he wrote, “Dairy.”



“Looks like dinnertime to me,” cracked Athena’s friend Conroy.

“Close,” said Mr. Gyan. “Anyone else?”

No one raised their hand. Everyone was busy thinking about dinner.

“This is a diagram of the five food groups,” said Mr. Gyan.

“It is recommended by the government to teach us how to eat well.”

Now, Athena raised her hand. “It looks like a plate and cup,” she said.

“Excellent observation, Athena,” said Mr. Gyan. “In 2011, the government began using this plate and cup diagram to make it easy to understand healthy eating.”



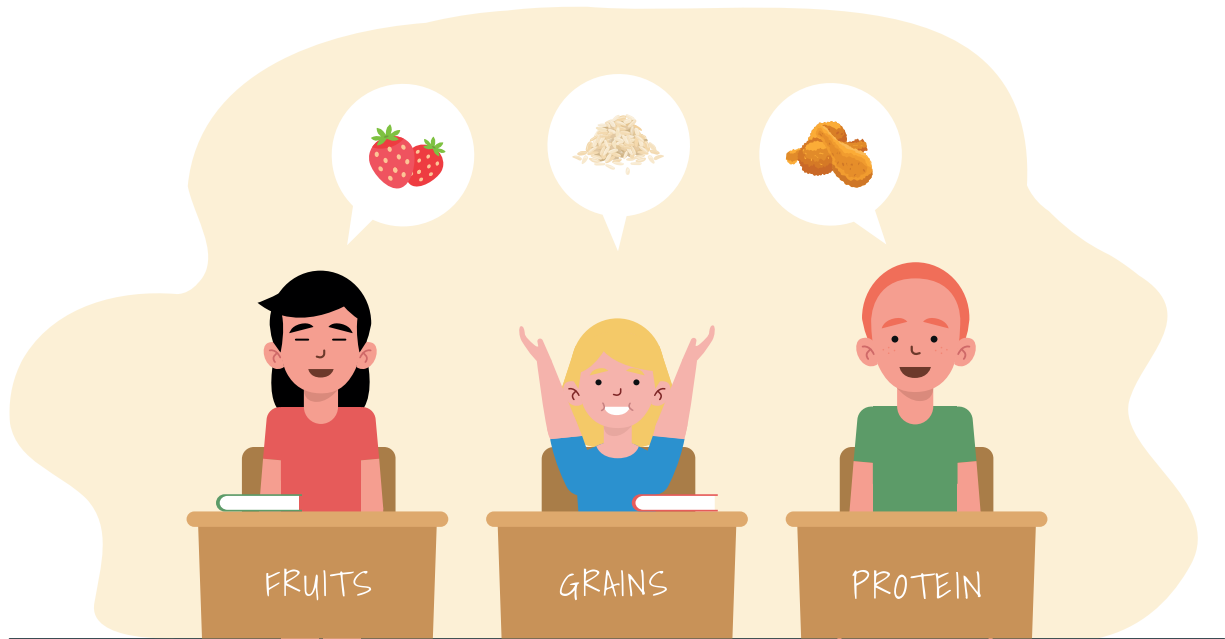
“But how can we use it?” she asked.

“We can use the diagram to plan our meals,” said Mr. Gyan. “It tells us that a healthy diet includes a balance of fruits, vegetables, grains, protein, and dairy.”

Conroy raised his hand again. “What about candy?” he asked.

“Well, candy is meant to be a treat. It has a lot of sugar, which is not something we should eat all the time,” said Mr. Gyan.

Athena and her classmates nodded. Now, it made sense why their parents wouldn’t let them eat sugary cereal for breakfast every day. Even when they asked nicely!



To help the class remember the five food groups, Mr. Gyan passed out pictures of different foods. Athena and her friends had to put them in the correct groups.

“Strawberries are fruit,” said her friend Hui.

“I think rice is a grain,” said her friend Zosia.

“Chicken is protein,” said Conroy. “That’s what the lunch lady told me when I ordered chicken nuggets.”

“Chicken nuggets are the best,” said Zosia.

Athena preferred meatloaf, but there was no time to say so.

At that moment, the bell rang. It was finally time to go home for dinner.

Thank goodness—her tummy was grumbling!

CHAPTER 2:
BROCCOLI, PLEASE!

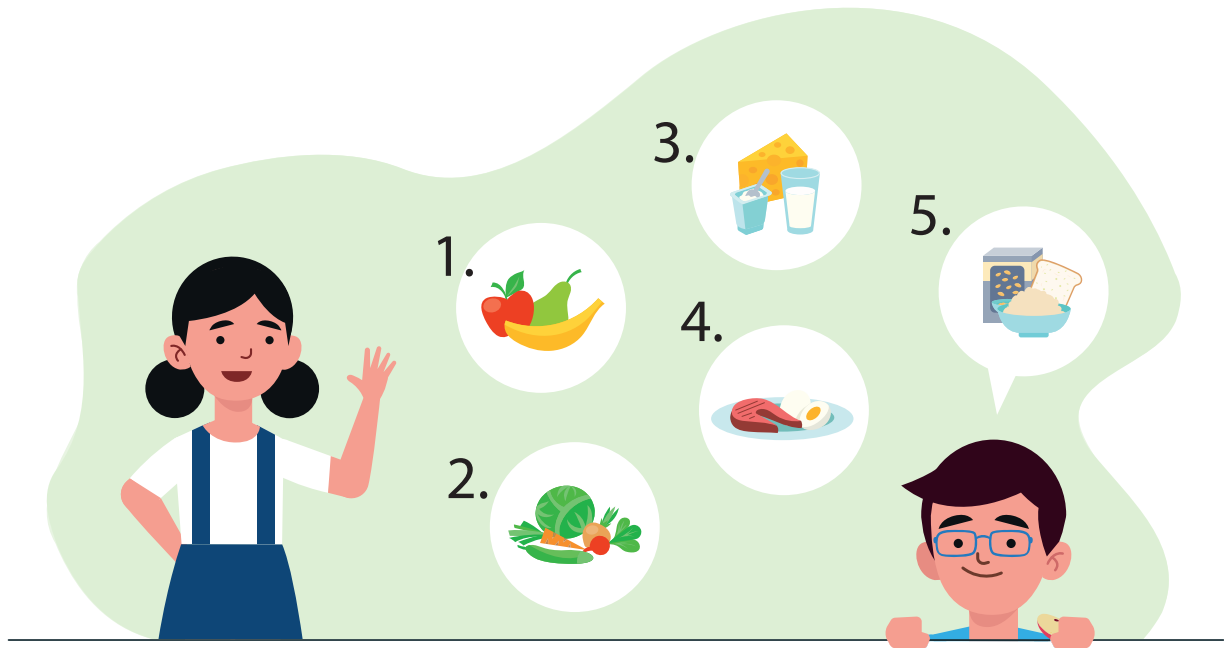


Athena hurried off the school bus and into her house. Her brother, Odin, ran beside her. He was in fifth grade. “Did you have a nice day?” she asked him.

“Fridays are always nice,” said Odin. “Did you learn anything interesting?” “Lots of things,” said Athena. She was excited to tell her parents about the five food groups. She took off her backpack and rushed into the kitchen.

“Welcome home, kids,” said Mama. She was slicing apples for Athena and Odin’s snack. “How was your day?”

“Mine was great,” said Athena. “Want to hear what I learned?” “Of course,” said Mama. She put the apples in a bowl with some peanut butter. Then, she passed it to the kids.



Odin grabbed an apple slice as Papa walked into the kitchen. He was carrying Athena and Odin’s little sister, Rae. “Snack time already?” he said. “Today flew right by.”

“Athena is about to tell us what she learned at school,” said Mama. The whole family listened as Athena shared Mr. Gyan’s lesson on healthy eating. “There are five food groups,” she said. “Fruits, vegetables, dairy, protein, and... another one I don’t remember.”

“Grains,” said Odin. His mouth was full, but Athena still understood. “Yes, grains,” she said. She took a slice of apple and some peanut butter. “A healthy diet is a balance of all five groups.”



“I’m glad Mr. Gyan is teaching you about this, Athena,” said Papa.

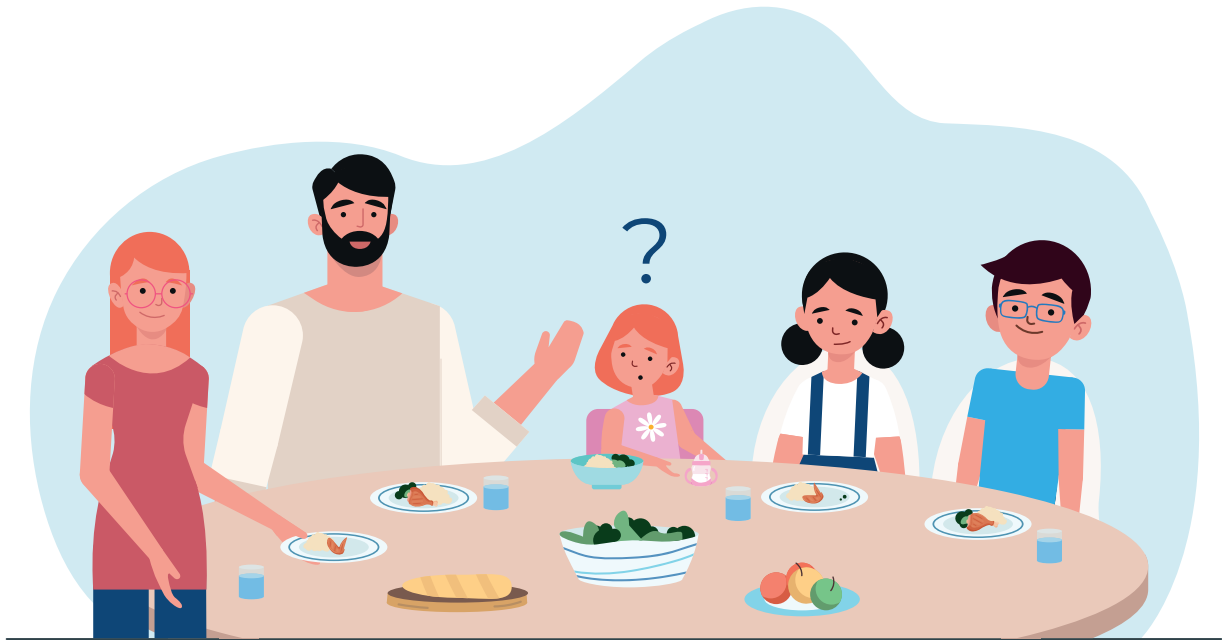
“Apples are fruit,” added four-year-old Rae.

Athena smiled at her sister. “That’s right.”

Mama was taking more food out of the refrigerator. She was smiling, too. “You’ll all be happy to know that we’re having a balanced dinner. I’m making chicken, rice, and broccoli. Can I count on you to eat it, Athena?”

In the past, Athena did not like broccoli at all. But now, she knew how important it was to eat her vegetables. They were a big part of the diagram that Mr. Gyan drew on the whiteboard.

“I will give broccoli another chance,” she promised.



Dinner was served! Athena ate her broccoli first.

The sooner that was done, the better.

“Have you seen the plate and cup diagram, Papa?” Athena asked.

“I have seen it,” said Papa. “It’s an important health policy.”

Athena’s family loved to talk about health policy. She and Odin knew a lot about it. Rae was still learning. She was only in preschool.

“What is a policy?” she asked.

“A policy is like an instruction from a parent or teacher,” said Papa.

“We don’t always like them, but they keep us safe and healthy.”



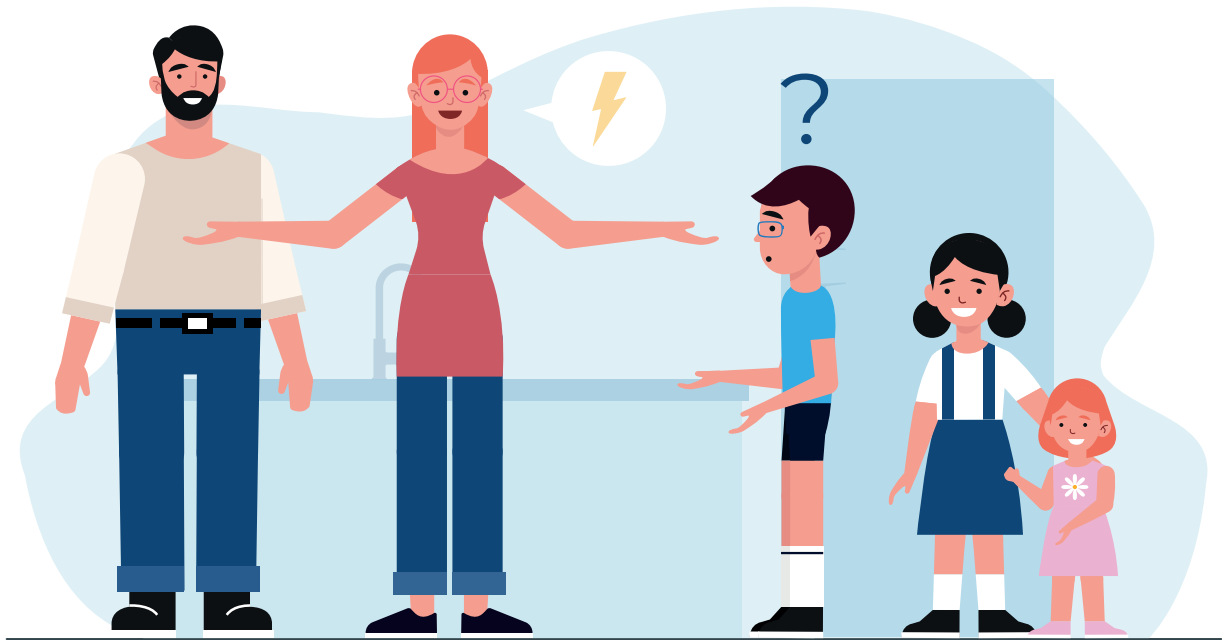
“Policies about food give us access, choices, and information,” said Mama.

“How?” asked Athena. She was finally finished with her broccoli.

It wasn’t as bad as she remembered—thank goodness.

“Well, policies tell us that we have a right to know what we’re eating,” Mama explained. “That’s why schools and restaurants offer healthy meal options. It’s also why the food at the supermarket is labeled with nutritional information that tells us what’s in it.”

“Labels help us make healthy choices,” Papa added.



Athena smiled. This was great news! When she grew up and did her own shopping, labels would help her.

“But why is healthy food so important?” asked Odin. He wished he could eat cookies every day. They tasted so much better than vegetables.

“Healthy food gives us more energy to play and learn,” said Mama. Papa nodded. “If we ate treats all the time, we would start to feel sick.”

Odin, Athena, and Rae frowned. They loved treats, but they also loved to play with their friends.

“I guess this means I can’t have pie for breakfast,” said Odin, and everyone laughed.

CHAPTER 3: NO LABELS



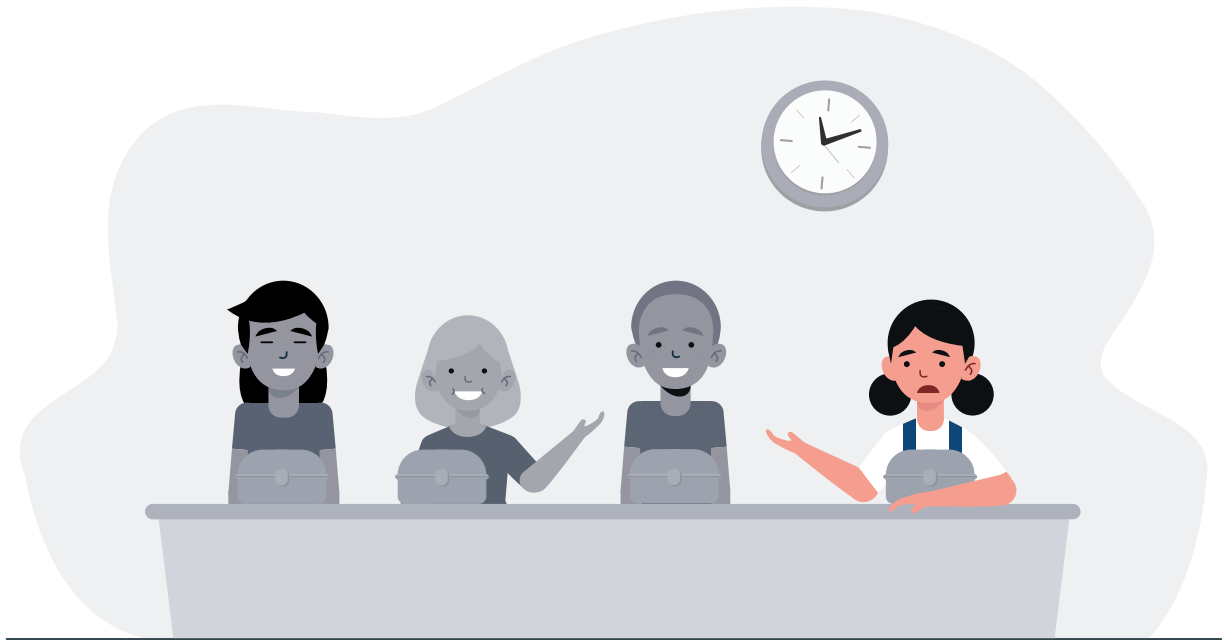
That night, Athena had a nightmare.

She was running up and down the aisles of the supermarket. She knew she wanted healthy food, but she couldn't find it anywhere.

Her tummy grumbled—she was so hungry!

Athena stopped in the cereal aisle and gasped. All the cereal boxes were gray. They had no names and no labels. How was she supposed to know what was inside?

Her head spun. She felt so tired, so weak. She reached for the closest cereal box... and then the nightmare changed.



Athena found herself at school. She was standing in the lunch line, waiting for her turn to order. It was such a relief to be in a familiar place.

Now, she could finally eat some healthy food.

But when she reached the front of the line, there was no one there to take her order. Instead, the lunch lady handed her a tray of food... in gray boxes!

What is all of this? Athena thought. How will I eat a balanced meal if I can't see the food on my tray?

Her friends joined her at a long cafeteria table. They seemed unbothered by the gray boxes. Zosia told a joke, and everyone laughed... except Athena. Her nightmare was changing again. When would this bad dream end?



Now, Athena was in a restaurant with her grandparents. She waited for a menu, but it never arrived. Instead, she and her grandparents were served bowls of gray soup.

“What is this?” Athena asked the waiter. But the waiter only shrugged and walked away. Turning to Grandpa, Athena said, “We must leave and find something healthy to eat.”

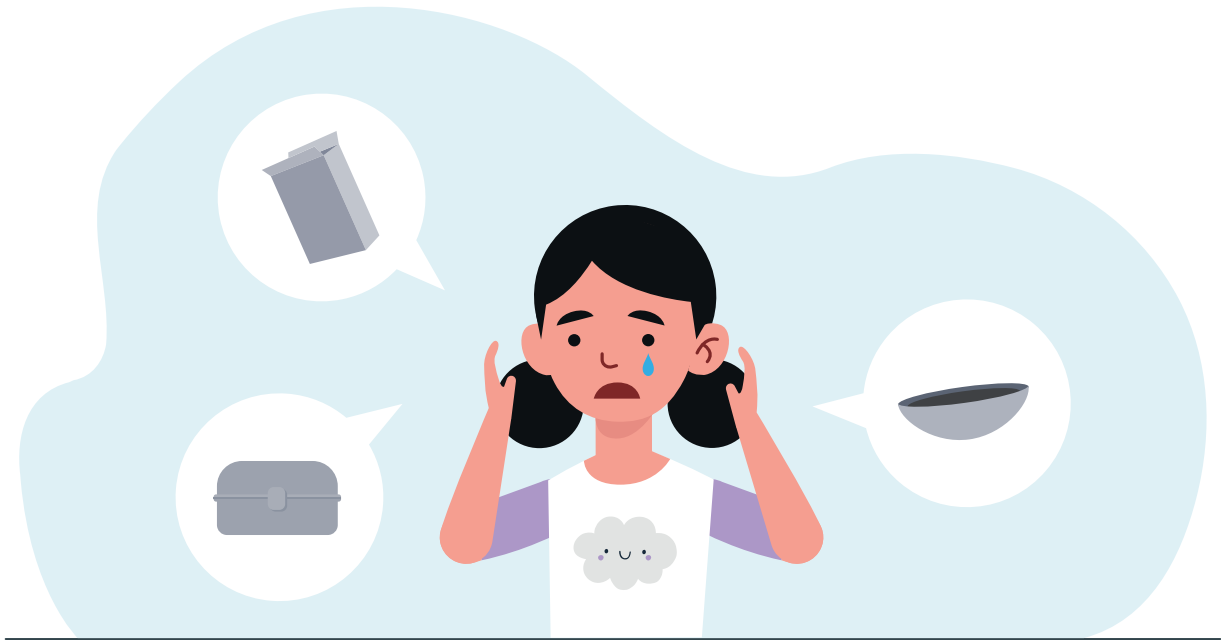
“All right,” he said. But when he tried to stand, he fell back into his chair.

This strange food was making him weak. On the other side of the table, Grandma was falling asleep.

I don't know what to do, Athena thought. I'm too little to carry them! Scared of what might happen next, she reached for Grandpa's hand...

And then, Athena woke up.

CHAPTER 4: HEALTHY SHOPPING



“Mama! Papa!”

It was still dark outside when Athena woke her parents. She could not go back to sleep. She had to tell someone about her nightmare.

“What’s wrong, sweetheart?” said Mama. She sounded sleepy.

Athena was sorry for waking her.

“I had the worst dreams,” she said. “I was at the supermarket, and I was so hungry, but there were no labels. And then the same thing happened at school! And Grandma and Grandpa were so sick because they were eating yucky food...”

Tears spilled onto her cheeks. What an awful night!



“Come here,” Mama said gently. She opened her arms,
and Athena rushed in for a hug.

“It was so strange,” Athena whispered.

“Don’t forget that you can always ask about healthy options at
school,

restaurants, and the supermarket,” said Papa.

Athena nodded. Her nightmare felt so real, but she knew she still had
access to healthy food.

“We have the right to choose what we eat,” Papa said. As he spoke,
Athena climbed up on the bed between him and Mama.

“It’s our responsibility to make good choices.”



“And remember that labels help us pick healthy foods at the supermarket,”
Mama added. “The government requires them to give us important
information about our food.”

Papa wrapped an arm around Athena, and she rested her head on his shoulder.

“These policies help children and adults stay healthy and strong,”
he told her. “And that includes your grandparents.”

Athena smiled and closed her eyes. It was comforting to know that the
government created policies to keep her loved ones healthy.

She felt safe now. In fact, she felt so safe that she sighed
and went back to sleep.



Birds chirped outside Mama and Papa’s windows. It was finally morning!
Athena jumped out of bed and hurried downstairs,
where breakfast was waiting.

“Good morning, Athena,” said Papa. “Are you feeling better?”

“Much better,” she said. “What is that smell?”

“I made eggs, toast, and fruit salad,” said Mama. She handed a plate to Athena.
“When you’re finished, I thought we could go to the supermarket. I’ll teach you
how to read labels and choose healthy food. How does that sound?”

“Perfect,” said Athena. She drizzled honey on her toast and sat down to eat.



“I want to come, too,” said Odin.

“Then Rae and I will go to the park,” said Papa.

Rae squealed. “Yes, please!”

And so, after breakfast, Papa and Rae walked to the park.

Mama, Athena, and Odin went to the supermarket.

“I want to look for my favorite cereal,” said Athena. “Will you help me read the label, Mama?”

“Of course.” Mama led her and Odin down the cereal aisle. “There’s the box on your left.”

Athena picked up the cereal box—it was purple and orange. She turned it over until she found the label. “What does this mean?” she asked.



Mama pointed to the numbers on the label. “These tell us how many calories, carbohydrates, fats, fibers, proteins, and vitamins are in each bowl of cereal.

This cereal has lots of fiber, which helps keep your stomach healthy.”

Athena nodded. “And what are the rest of these things?”

Smiling, Mama said, “Calories measure the energy in our food, which helps us run, jump, and play. Carbohydrates are an important source of energy—like fuel for your body. Fat is also necessary for health, but we don’t want to eat too much of it, or we risk getting sick.”

“Then why do we need it?” asked Athena.



“Because fat helps us grow by absorbing vitamins,” Mama explained.

“And what are proteins?” asked Odin.

“Proteins make up our muscles, bones, and other tissues,” Mama replied.

“That means they help our bodies grow and heal. There are vegetable proteins in beans, seeds, and nuts, and there are animal proteins in things like eggs, meats, and cheeses.”

Athena read the ingredients on her cereal box. “It doesn’t have a lot of sugar,” she said. “That’s good, right?”

“That’s very good,” said Mama. “It will keep you feeling full.”

Athena put her cereal in the shopping cart. “What about you, Odin? Is your cereal healthy?”



Odin was reading the label on a red cereal box. “This one has lots of sugar,” he said. “I think we should get an extra box of yours instead.”

“Excellent choice, Odin,” said Mama. She put a second box of cereal in the cart.

“What would you like for school snacks this week?”

“Apples, please,” said Odin.

Athena thought for a moment. “I want to eat more veggies,” she said. “How about carrot sticks?”

“We’ll get both,” said Mama. She was proud of Athena and Odin for choosing healthy snacks.

Athena smiled. She could hardly believe that just a few days ago, she didn’t know anything about reading labels. It seemed so simple now.

CHAPTER 5: FOOD WITH FRIENDS



At school on Monday, Athena told her friends all about her nightmare.
Just like her, they found it frightening.

“I love choosing my school lunch,” said Conroy. “If there were no options,
it would be ruined!”

“And it would be so hard to go to the supermarket alone,
with no idea what to buy,” said Zosia.

“Actually,” said Athena, “my mom took me to the supermarket on Saturday.
She taught me how to read the labels so I can make healthy choices.”

“But how?” Zosia asked.

“The labels tell you what’s in your food and how much,” said Athena. “All you
have to do is read the label and see if the ingredients are healthy or not.”

“That doesn’t sound too hard,” said Hui.



“But what if there’s no label?” Zosia asked.

“Oh, labels are a health policy,” said Athena. “The government requires them to give us important information about our food.”

The bell rang, and everyone sat down at their desks. Athena felt a tap on her shoulder and heard Zosia whisper, “What is a policy?”

Athena was about to answer when Mr. Gyan caught them.

From the front of the classroom, he said, “Zosia, is there something you’d like to share with the class?”

Zosia blushed. “Sorry, Mr. Gyan. I was just asking Athena what a policy is.”

Mr. Gyan raised an eyebrow. “Is that so? What an important question.

Athena, why don’t you share the answer with us?”



Athena stood and faced her classmates. “A policy is like an instruction from a teacher or parent. We don’t always like them, but they keep us safe and healthy.

The plate and cup diagram is a policy that helps us eat balanced meals.”

Mr. Gyan clapped his hands. “Very good—and perfect for today’s lesson.

We’re going to discuss the value of healthy food.”

“Do you mean the price?” asked Hui.

“Not exactly,” said Mr. Gyan. “Does anyone know the true value of healthy food?”

Athena raised her hand. “It gives us energy to learn and play,” she said.

“That’s right,” said Mr. Gyan. He taught the class about healthy foods until it was time for lunch. By then, everyone was excited to get to the cafeteria.

All this talking about food made them hungry!



Athena and her friends walked through the lunch line and chose their meals.

They were so grateful that nothing was hiding inside a gray box. They had access to all five food groups and plenty of healthy options.

“I love health policy,” Conroy said between bites of turkey sandwich.

“Conroy, you just love eating,” Hui laughed.

“Well, it’s important!”

Athena ate her fruit and grinned.

She had a feeling that she wouldn’t have any more nightmares about a world without labels.

THE END



You can practice health policy just like Athena.
Choose healthy foods that give you the energy you need and encourage
your loved ones to do the same!

Writing this series of storybooks is a dream come true and is more rewarding than I ever could have imagined. I want kids of all ages to know that working in health policy is as viable as becoming a doctor, an architect, a teacher, or a farmer.

Thank you so much to my teammates for helping me conceptualize and write each book; to our amazing editor, Aquinnah Bree; and to our talented illustrators, Melina Sugliano and Rodrigo Palacios. In creating this series, we have also created a lifelong bond.

- Ana Rita Gonzalez, President & CEO, Policy Wisdom LLC

We truly hope you enjoyed reading this edition in the Athena's
Adventures in Health Policy series!

We invite you to encourage the young people in your life
who are interested in public health to learn more about us
and our networks.

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Athena is in third grade, and her class is learning about healthy diets and nutrition. But afterward, she has a terrible nightmare. In a world with no nutrition labels, she can't find a balanced meal.

When she wakes up, Athena's parents teach her about the health policies that govern food products in supermarkets, restaurants, and schools. This gives her the confidence to go grocery shopping—but will she find friendly foods?

Through Athena's Adventures in Health Policy, Policy Wisdom aims to inspire the next generation of public health professionals and show them the importance and impact of health policies. Learn more about our mission at policywisdom.com.

