

Los Angeles Times CALENDAR weekend

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WITH THE KIDS

C is for carrot, when Sesame presents 'Body'

No cookies here. Kids can learn healthy habits for life at a science exhibit with familiar characters.

By Brenda Rees
Special to The Times

WHEN Cookie Monster put down his chocolate chip cookie and fiendishly gobbled up a carrot, it was a sure sign that the times were a-changin' down on Sesame Street.

Indeed, although the PBS children's show has added many new elements in its 38 years on the air, one of the biggest changes took place in 2005, when the show launched segments on the values of good nutrition, exercise and proper sleep habits.

After all, the popular TV show has worked its alphabetical and numerical magic on many generations, so why couldn't those furry friends also impart health consciousness to today's tykes?

Families can explore that question when they check out the traveling exhibition "Sesame Street Presents: The Body," at the Discovery Science Center in Santa Ana. It runs through April 29.

"The Body" features familiar Sesame Street characters in a variety of interactive displays that show how the human body works and what children can do to take care of their own bodies. Kids ages 2 to 8 can enjoy puzzles, hands-on activities and animated songs and games.

"The challenge was to be simple for the nonreaders but also have enough information so that older kids will walk away with some new knowledge," says Jennifer Miller, tour manager with Thinkwell Design & Production, the company that partnered with Sesame Workshop to create the exhibition.

The displays are geared to those in the 3 feet and under set — speakers and monitors are positioned low so adults may have to bend down to hear or see what's happening. Factual tidbits are posted practically everywhere — 27 bones in your hand, food stays in your large intestine for up to 16 hours, your heart could pump out a swimming pool in one month — and are presented with the typical Sesame Street blend of informativeness and silliness.

For example, youngsters can learn about internal organs by playing the keys on Count Von Count's organ, join in an interactive hygiene game with Ernie and Rubber Duckie or be a contestant on game show emcee Guy Smiley's "Use Your Brain" program.

Naturally, Oscar the Grouch is the tour guide for the digestive system, beginning with a huge mouth (with crunching sound effects) through a stomach churning with acid to the food's eventual elimination from the body (again, with sound effects that play to children's love for gross-out gags).

Also under Oscar's slimy jurisdiction are displays of a beating heart, a breathing lung and a giant nose. Brave guests can stand underneath the mega-schnoz, pull a lever and see if they are greeted with a gentle sniff or a wet sneeze.

Very young children can plop down in a re-creation of Elmo's crayon world, serve up sandwiches and other fare at Mr. Hooper's counter or explore fruits and vegetables in Baby Bear's Mini-Mart.

Some individual body parts, such as hands, feet and brain, are given special attention. The brain is a NASA-like command center loaded with numerous buttons, switches, dials and monitors.

Kids can pick up a phone receiver and listen in as the "brain leader" makes decisions and sends instructions to various body parts.

Finally, after all that education, antsy tots can burn off extra energy upstairs at Super Grover's Obstacle Course, a foam-filled arena with slides, tunnels and a crash wall. If that's not enough, the nearby Grover's Disco Dance Party invites kids to boogie, strut and shake in a stage-like setting.

Tidbits of good-for-you knowledge imparted by familiarly goofy friends — despite all the fancy bells and whistles, "The Body" is classic Sesame Street.

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`Sesame Street Presents: The Body'

Where: Discovery Science Center, 2500 N. Main St., Santa Ana

When: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily through April 29

Price: \$12.95 adults, \$9.95 children 2 and older