

INFLUENCES ON NUTRITIONAL PRACTICES AND WELLNESS ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

Psychological, Cultural and Social Influences on Food Choices

Grade Levels: 7-12

Concept: Psychological, Cultural and Social Influences on Food Choices

Comprehensive Standard: 6.1 Analyze the factors that influence nutritional practices and wellness across the lifespan

Technical Standard: 6.1.1 Examine the psychological, cultural and social influences related to food choices

LESSON COMPETENCIES:

- ? Identify influences on the food choices (MS)
- ? Analyze internal and external influences on food choices (HS)
- ? Analyze marketing strategies that influence food choices (HS)

ANTICIPATED BEHAVIORAL OUTCOMES:

- ? Students recognize the numerous influences on food choices made by individuals and families.
- ? Students are willing to try new foods.

Resources Needed:

- Overhead transparency of *Factors That Influence Food Choices*
- Map of world and slips of paper
- Foods from around the world for tasting panel
- Copies of all handouts/graphic organizer for each student
- Foods for tasting panel

References for teachers and students:

West, Dorothy. (2000). Nutrition and Fitness: Lifestyle Choices for Wellness. The Goodheart-Wilcox Company, Inc., Tinley Park, Ill. Chapter 2: Factors Affecting Food Choices, pp. 26-40

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (1996). Family, Food and Society: A Teacher's Guide. WI Department of Public Instruction, Milwaukee, WI.

A lesson plan on this topic is available at www.healthteacher.com This site is no longer free; it does require a subscription.

A wide variety of resources on ethnic and cultural influences on food choices including food guide pyramids from different cultures can be accessed at the Food and Nutrition Information Center at www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/ Click on Topics A-Z and then click on Ethnic and Cultural.

Background Information:

Food choices are influenced by many factors:

- ? age
- ? gender

- ? friends
- ? family
- ? role models
- ? cultural background
- ? where we live
- ? advertising
- ? nutrition knowledge
- ? others

People bond and foster relationships around the dinner table and at celebrations with special meals and foods, such as birthday cake or a graduation reception. Some people use food to cope with stress by overeating or depriving themselves of food. Food may also be used as a reward for accomplishing a specific goal or as a way of expressing creativity. Food is also a big part of social events. Consequently, what people eat can reveal much about who they are socially, politically and culturally.

Factors influencing food choices include:

- ? **Taste, texture and appearance**
- ? **Economics** – the cost of food affects what we eat and/or the impact on the global economy.
- ? **Our early experiences with food** –food preferences begin early in life and change as we are exposed to new people and places. As children, our choices were in the hands of our parents. However, as we get older, our experiences with new people and places increase, thereby offering a broader opportunity for experiencing new foods and expanding our food preferences and choices.
- ? **Habits** – Most of us eat from a particular core group of foods. About 100 items account for 75% of the foods most people eat. Having a narrow range of food choices provides us with security. For example, going to a particular fast-food restaurant provides common expectations and experiences. In addition, many people also acquire the cooking habits and meal planning choices of their mothers or grandmothers. For example, serving a Thanksgiving turkey with “stuffing” in the Midwest versus “chestnut dressing” in the East.
- ? **Culture** – Religious values can affect food choices. For example, Hindus do not eat beef and some Jewish people do not eat pork. The ethnic heritage of families can also affect eating behaviors. For example, families of Norwegian descent may serve lutefisk and lefse for a holiday celebration while families of German descent might serve rouladen and strudel. . Culture can also dictate the times to eat and what to eat at certain meals.
- ? **Geographic location** -The area of the world that we live in also influences food choices. In Sweden, people would not eat an ear of corn because that is considered food for hogs. In the United States, we don’t normally eat insects, but in many parts of the world, they are regarded as preferred foods
- ? **Advertising/Marketing** – Food producers spend billions of dollars each year on advertising and packaging to capture the attention and interest of the consumer. The power of persuasion is strong, and so food producers and

restaurants try to make their products as appealing as possible to consumers, even if it means making false claims.

- ? **Social factors** – Social changes have a big effect on the food industry. Our fast-paced society demands drive-through restaurants, salads in a bag, and microwaveable entrees. Gas stations now have restaurants attached to them so that people can do one-stop shopping while on the road. Social relationships with our peers also influence our food choices. When friends gather, food choices may be made based on our desire to feel accepted as part of the group.
- ? **Health/Weight Concerns** – Some people have health concerns that influence food choices. For example, a young person with diabetes must choose foods low in sugar to assist in maintaining appropriate blood sugar levels. Others have concerns about their weight – overweight or underweight.
- ? **Emotions** - Our emotions also play a role in food choices. We may eat some foods when we are happy and others when we are sad.

Learning Activities:

Middle School Level

- ? Ask students to make a list of their ten favorite foods. Ask the following questions and list student responses on the board:
 - Why did you choose these foods?
 - Are there some foods that several of you have on your list? What are they?
 - What types of foods would your parents have on their lists?
 - What types of foods does your family serve at holidays (i.e. Thanksgiving, Christmas)? Why are these foods served?
- ? Ask students to brainstorm responses to the question: “What influences the food choices that we make?” Use the transparency master *Factors That Influence Food Choices* and the graphic organizer for students and discuss each of these factors with students. Give examples of each influence and ask students to give examples.
- ? Ask students to complete the t-chart, “*Social Times and the Foods We Choose*”. Discuss other social events that the students associate with particular foods and why they make these associations. Discuss:
 - Would these food choices be the same in other regions of the U.S.?
 - How might these food choices be different in other regions?
- ? Ask students to brainstorm all of the ethnic foods that they have tried or have heard about. Students write these foods on slips of paper and identify countries of origin by placing the foods on a world map. Teacher may add to the list by identifying ethnic foods he/she has tried. Discuss influence of other cultures on American food habits/choices.
- ? Hold a “tasting panel” with foods from around the world that students may not have tried (mango, papaya, pomegranate, etc.). Identify country of origin. (The map could be use again for this activity.) Discuss how we develop a

preference for foods - different tastes, textures, appearance, how it is prepared, etc.

- ? Have students conduct a survey of all students in their class or school. After compiling the results of their survey, develop a list of the “Top Ten Favorite Foods”. Discuss with students:
 - Why are these foods popular?
 - Would your parents choose the same foods? Why or why not?
 - What influences your food choices?

High School Level

- ? Ask students to brainstorm their responses to the question: “Why do we choose to eat the foods that we do?” List student responses on the board.
- ? Use the transparency master *Factors That Influence Food Choices* and the graphic organizer for students and discuss each of these factors with students. Give examples of each influence and ask students to give examples.
- ? Following this illustrated lecture on the influences on our food choices, ask students to complete “*Influences on Food Choices*”. Discuss responses. Ask students to identify other situations or choices they have made or others have made that represent the influences on the handout.
- ? Hold a “tasting panel” with foods from around the world that students may not have tried (mango, papaya, pomegranate, etc.). Identify country of origin. (The map could be use again for this activity.) Discuss how we develop a preference for foods - different tastes, textures, appearance, how it is prepared, etc.
- ? “Wrap it Up” – ask students to identify what they have learned from these activities and how it might influence their future food choices.