Factors Affecting Food Choices

Culture
Social
Emotions
Agriculture, Technology, Economics, Politics
Food Is a Reflection of Culture

- **Culture** refers to the beliefs and social customs of a group of people.
- **Culture** affects all aspects of a person’s life – from where you live to how you dress.
- The foods people serve for a meal is an example of cultural influence.
- **Culture** changes over time as new ideas are introduced. For example, people have become more health conscious – eating low-fat foods, buying exercise equipment and memberships to health clubs.
Historical Influences

- Many people in North America have their roots based in other cultures (Europe, Africa, Asia, Latin America).
- When people arrived in North America from these other places, they brought many foods and food customs with them.

Ethnic Influences

- Early settlers brought: grains - wheat, barley, oats, rye; and fruits and vegetables – including: figs, dates, broccoli, carrots, mint, parsley.
- Native Peoples were already growing corn, beans, potatoes, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, squash, chili peppers, and pumpkins.
Ethnic Influences

- **Ethnic Groups** are people who share common blood ties, land ties, or racial and religious similarities.
- They are pulled together by their shared beliefs and group norms.
- Members also share food traditions.

- **Ethnic Foods** are foods that are typical of a given racial, national, or religious culture. They can often be recognized by their ingredients, seasonings, and preparation (curry, jerk chicken, lasagna).
- **Ethnic ingredients** are usually plentiful in the region from which the foods come. (Middle Eastern foods: saffron, cumin, ginger)
Food Norms are typical standards and patterns related to food eating behaviours.

- Some ethnic groups have special ways of selecting, buying, cooking, serving, eating, and storing foods.
For example, some:

- Italians shop everyday for the freshest ingredients,
- Indian cooks prepare foods in a special oven called a *tandoor*,
- British serve tea with biscuits or sandwiches as a light meal in the late afternoon (high tea).
Ethnic food traditions help build bonds of togetherness. Many ethnic groups serve special foods on certain days of the year to build positive emotions.

- On New Year’s Day...
  - Japanese eat black beans (good health and fortune)
  - Jewish people eat apples and honey (sweetness)
  - Spanish, Portuguese, Hungarians, Cubans eat suckling pig and other pork delicacies (progress)
Food Taboos: A social custom that prohibits the use of certain edible resources as food.

For example, Hindus do not eat beef (cow’s are sacred), Muslims, Jews and some Christian denominations do not eat pork.
Regional Influences

People may choose to eat some foods because they are popular in the region in which they live because of the predominant ethnic group living there.

West Coast – Asian (rice and stir-fry cooking method).
American Southwest – Mexican food

Religious Influences

• Certain religious groups have rules regarding what members may or may not eat or do.
  E.g. Orthodox Jews – no pork or shellfish. Eat kosher foods (diary and meat not stored, prepared or eaten together).
  Muslims fasting for Ramadan, Halal
Social Influences on Food

**FAMILY**
- The family is a major influence on the diets of young children.
- Influencing: beliefs about food, table manners, food traditions, likes and dislikes.
The family has changed over time leading to new trends in what, how, and when families eat.

How have the following trends influenced what, how or when families eat?

- working single parents,
- dual-income families,
- Smaller average family size
- more mobile families (commute to jobs, kids in extra-curricular activities)
Values make a difference in the kinds of changes seen in family food behaviours.

Values are beliefs and attitudes that are important to people.

Traditions, such as making special foods and eating together, are important values in many families.
**Friends**

- Friends and peers play a major role in determining what, where, and when people eat.
- Anywhere and anytime (breakfast, lunch, late night) people gather you will likely see food (sporting events, cafeteria, movie theatre, parties, work meeting, etc.).
- Popular foods chosen may not always be healthy (fast food, snacks, etc.)
Status of Foods

- Status foods are foods that have a social impact on others. The status of food often affect the cost, but has little to do with the nutritional quality.

- They are often served at special occasions to influence or impress “important” people. – caviar, filet mignon, lobster
Media

- Print and electronic media have a very strong influence on food choices—what you eat, when you eat and how you eat!
- food preparation, buying foods reported to have certain health benefits, fast (convenience) foods,
Emotions Affect Food Choices

- Many people choose to eat or avoid certain foods for emotional reasons.
- Emotional responses can outweigh hunger pangs and nutrition knowledge in its effect on food choices. (e.g. eat hot dog, then get sick, never eat hot dog again)
Emotional Responses to Food

What comes to mind when you hear:
Liver – chocolate – spinach – ice cream

- People develop most of their responses toward foods early in life.
- Your culture (family, school, community, religion) affects how you will react to the food presented to you.
- Some emotional responses to food may be associated with gender (meat & potatoes – male; quiche, parfaits – female)
Using Food to Deal with Emotions

- Food can be used to express emotions.
- Sometimes as a symbol of love and caring (taking food to ill neighbours/friend, at a death in the family).
- Food may also help meet emotional needs:
  - to cheer you up - chocolate
  - comfort - Grandmother’s mac & cheese
  - celebrate good news – ice-cream
  - nourish mind (& body) – chicken noodle soup
Using Food to Deal with Emotions (cont’d)

- Frustration can lead some people to eat more or less food than their bodies need.
- Other people use food to help them deal with fears.
- They use the pleasure of eating to avoid thoughts that are scary or annoying.
- Some feelings related to food can be harmful – (eating disorders)
Individual Preferences Affect Food Choices

- Make a list of the foods you like to eat...
- People choose to eat many foods simply because they like them.
- Preference is affected by – genetics (taste buds), experiences with food (familiarity)
The Influences of Agriculture, Technology, Economics, and Politics

- **Agriculture and Land Use**
- Food production is plentiful when important resources are available to grow crops.

- These resources include:
  - fertile soil
  - adequate water supply
  - favourable climate
  - technological knowledge
  - Human energy
Technology

Technology is the application of a certain body of knowledge.

In the last 75 – 100 years many changes in technology and agriculture have influenced how food gets from farm to table.

These technological changes (advances) include:

- Farming machinery
- Faster food processing systems
- Rapid transportation
- New foods and food handling processes
- Packaging
The Economics of Food
- Economics has much to do with the availability of food.
- If a country cannot afford the agricultural supplies (seeds, equipment, fertilizer), food production will be limited.
- Poverty is a close relative of hunger.

The Politics of Food
- The people in political power decide how money will be spent in their country.
- They decide:
  - how much money will be spent to address food problems
  - what lands will be used for food production
  - what crops will be grown (for own use or export)
  - sometimes, how food will be distributed.
Nutrition Knowledge Affects Food Choices

- Knowledge of accurate nutritional information is needed to make informed food decisions.
- Choose reliable reference materials (in print or electronic media) to help get accurate information.
- Knowledge about health (illnesses—diabetes, hypertension) and diet is also needed to make the best food decisions.