

**Factors affecting food**  
**choices**

**and**

**household level practices**

# Ecological and Geographical

Availability of foods in the environment and the relative cost both in time and money of acquiring and then processing particular classes of foods are important factors in any cultural survival strategy.

Factor affecting food selection is the amount of time available to the food provider or preparer—usually the focal female (head decision-maker) of a household

# Geographical

Each culture has its own definition of what constitute a 'meal' as opposed to a 'snack' and this definition determines what food are appropriate at different times of the day. For example, in Malaysia, cooked rice defines a meal and any food eaten without cooked rice is defined as a snack.

# Sensory Qualities of foods and culture

Food selection is governed by no. of sensory characteristics such as:-


- Taste
- Visual
- Texture

# Taste

A liking for sweet taste and a rejection of bitter seem to be innate, perhaps as a result of biological “coding” of safe versus “poisonous” foods. Experiences with in particular cultures however, effect how taste qualities are conceived and labeled, how preferences for degrees of sweet, bitter, and other flavors are formed and how both of these influence intake. Example, Mexicans enjoy beverages sugar to a degree that is perceived as “too sweet” by most American standards, while Mexicans find the bitterness of unsweetened American coffee unpleasant.

# Texture

Texture is a second essential element in food selection and preferences. In large part, texture determines whether a food is familiar and may influence the acceptance of new foods. In Africa, where the basic staple is porridge, ranging from thick to watery, different groups distinguish themselves by the texture they prefer in their staple food. When they are given a new commodity, they will generally accept it more easily if they can be eaten in forms that are familiar in texture.



For eg; a rice eating cultures, donated food in the form of grits or bulghur (wheat) may be more acceptable than grains delivered in the form of flours or meals.

Besides, certain textural properties are also intrinsic in judgments of qualities like “crispiness”, “crunchiness”, and “freshness”, or of which are important in the selection of food items.

# Visual characteristics

In any food item size, shape and color are all additional sensory properties that influence food selection and preferences. As one visual characteristics of food, 'color' often provides a code by which people label and rank varieties within more general species of food with particular textural or taste properties.

Example; in Mexico maize is preferred for tortillas, since white tortillas are said to look "cleaner", to have softer texture, and to taste better than tortillas made of yellow, red or purple maize.

Another interesting function of colour is that it may provide a sign of expected quality, including ripeness, wholesomeness, and taste in fruits and vegetables.



# Socio cultural

Foods may also be classified according to a no.of cultural factors, such as;

- Hot-cold
- Age and gender discrimination
- Education
- Ethnic and Religious factors

# Hot - Cold


This system of classification is based on hot-cold values and refers to an intrinsic quality rather than to temperature or spiciness and is ideally present within the human body in appropriate balance.

Too much of heat or cold, caused by overconsumption of either hot or cold substances, overexertion, over heating the body, overexposure (to climate or other heat or chills), or usually the combination of these factors producing an imbalance believed to result in illness.

# Age and gender factors

Foods are also judged to be more or less appropriate for certain classes of individuals and for certain occasions. Certain types of foods, for eg; are adjudged to be particularly good for or only edible by children. They are usually those that are observed to be pleasing to children; often they are bland (not overly spicy) and easy to digest. Since these foods do not make children to sick, these are believed to foster growth.

Restriction on some foods for very young children are almost universal, although the particular foods and the rationales for withholding them differ from one culture to another. Such restrictions may have their basis in notions of indigestibility. For example, whole grains pass undigested through the digestive tract into the stools.



In South-East Asia, young boys may have “cool” foods withdrawn, since their cool qualities are believed to interfere with growth and maturation. Because green leafy vegetables and most fruits – major dietary sources of vitamin A – are classified as ‘Cool’ and because such foods are restricted, male children may suffer from vitamin A deficiency.

# Education


A lack of education can increase the risk of making an unhealthy food choice. By making the unhealthy food choices, food insecure households increase. Education can improve the ability of food insecure households to make healthful food choices and allocate income efficiently.

# Religion

Religion plays one of the most influential role in the choices and subsequent selection of foods consumed in certain societies. For example, in the Hindu and Buddhist religions the consumption of both pork and beef is frowned upon. This is because it is considered to not be clean meat.

# Poverty, Economic status

Economic status may also direct patterns of food intakes and avoidances. Members of particular society mark caste and religious group affiliations by sharing, food avoidances, festival foods and ordinary food preparations and consumption as a group. Class factors also affect food choices and concept of what is culturally “appropriate” for one of a given socio-economic to consume.



Example, in Latin America, an increasing tendency for people to forgo “wild” greens in favour of cultivated vegetables because consumption of wild foods is considered to be a sign of poverty.

Inadequate nutrition levels were a result of lack of nutrition knowledge, but of lack of money.

Real problem in malnutrition is lack of food purchasing power.



# Intra – household distribution of food

Generally, intra-household food allocation have relied either on anthropometric indicators such as weight-for-age and height-for-age, standardized by measurements from a health reference population, or on measurements of diet adequacy, which assess the degrees to which the caloric/nutrient intakes of individuals meet established requirements.



**Thank You**