

Lesson 6: Understanding Influences on Food Choices



Lesson 6: Understanding Influences on Food Choices

Background Information

The Western food environment tends to be filled with a variety of food choices and many factors that contribute to decision-making when selecting foods.



Some examples of the **factors of influence** that contribute to an individual's food choices include **individual factors**, such as knowledge, personal taste preference, mood, hunger level, health status, special diet requirements, ethnicity, and personal income.

Environmental factors such as weather, time of day, environment, or advertisements also influence food choices. Restaurants and markets often take advantage of this. For example, a grocery store might put items at eye level to encourage shoppers to purchase the item, or a buffet restaurant might place items in a certain order, knowing that customers will often choose to take more of the first few items. Other more indirect factors may effect food choices. For example, government policies might influence the cost of raw materials, as could weather or climate. The resulting changes in

prices could in turn influence food purchases.

As an example of factors influencing food choice: an individual that hasn't eaten all day (hunger level), has little money to spend (personal income), and is running late to their second job (time) might choose a two-for-one taco special at a fast food restaurant.

Many of these factors are apparent when we consider the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program. Many factors influence the students' choices, such as length of the serving line, the presence of colorful fruits and vegetables on the salad bar, or time available for purchasing and consuming the meal.



Concepts and Vocabulary

Environmental factors: Aspects of a setting, atmosphere, or location that influence an individual's choices, such as layout, ambience, marketing, and availability.

Factors of influence: Factors that can contribute to an individual's food choice, which are both individual and environmental.

Personal factors: Personal characteristics that influence choices, such as taste preference, knowledge, hunger level, income, and special diet requirements.



6.1: Learning Activity

Getting Ready



Time Required

45 minutes



Materials Needed

(*Materials provided in the curriculum)

- Flip chart paper
- Markers, pens, or pencils
- **Food Choice Scenarios* (Appendix 6A)
- Prepared flip chart papers for each scenario
- Flip chart markers.

Optional:

- **Focus on Food Lesson 6* (PowerPoint)
- Computer
- PowerPoint Projector



Preparation

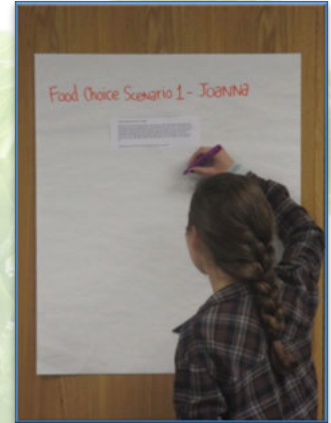
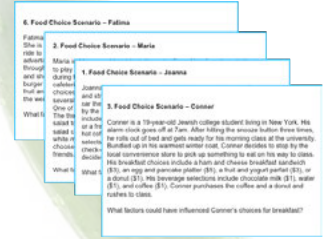
1. Make one copy of *Food Choice Scenarios* (Appendix 6A).
2. Next, use the dotted lines to cut out each scenario, resulting in 6 scenarios.
3. Prepare one flip chart for each of the characters listed on the *Food Choice Scenarios* (Appendix 6A). Each flip chart should have the following: number and name of scenario written across the top; scenario taped or passed to the flip chart.
4. Post the prepared flip chart papers in numerical order around the room.
5. Organize the class into small groups of 2 to 4 participants.

Facilitator Tip: These groups can be the same groups formed in earlier lessons.

6. Provide each group with a sheet of flip chart paper and markers, pens, or pencils to answer opening questions/prompts.

Optional:

7. Before participants arrive, connect laptop to projector. Load *Focus on Food Lesson 6* (PowerPoint).





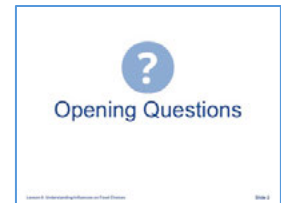
Opening Questions/Prompts

1. **Say:** Let's get started with Lesson 6 – Understanding Influences on Food Choices! To begin, I'd like everyone to discuss an opening question within your group. Once you've discussed the prompt within your groups, we will come back together as a class and discuss your thoughts and responses as a whole. **(Slide 2)**

The prompt I'd like you to discuss within your groups is:

- Explain what you know about how our food choices are influenced. **(Slide 3)**
2. **Do:** Allow 2 to 3 minutes for groups to discuss the prompt.
 3. **Say:** As a class, let's discuss what you talked about in your groups. What were some of your thoughts on the first prompt, "Explain what you know about how our food choices are influenced"?
 4. **Do:** Allow about a minute for participants to share their thoughts on this topic with the class.

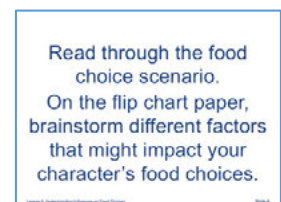
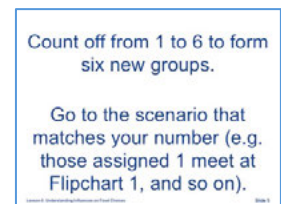
Facilitator Tip: This sharing phase is a great opportunity to begin to build rapport with participants. Some statements and questions to help engage participants at this phase are: "Tell me more about that"; "What do you mean by..."; "How is that motivating you?"; "Did anyone else write this?"; "That's a very popular opinion." At this stage, it is important that you do not correct misconceptions. Instead, make note of them, and if they are not corrected organically through the lesson, address them briefly at the end of the lesson.



Procedure (Experiencing)

1. **Say:** Now that we've completed our opening discussion, we'll start on the activity for this lesson. This activity involves factors that influence food choices. **(Slide 4)**
 - There are six flip chart papers with different scenarios around the room.
 - I'm going to count off by six, after which you'll go to the scenario that matches your number.
 - Within these groups, read through the food choice scenario on the flip chart paper and brainstorm different factors that might impact the character's food choices. **(Slide 5)**
 - You should write the factors you brainstorm on the flip chart paper. **(Slide 6)**
2. **Do:** Have the learners count off from 1 to 6 to form six new groups.
3. **Do:** Allow one to two minutes for the groups to read the scenario and brainstorm at least two to three factors.

Facilitator Tip: When visiting with each group, use targeted questions to guide them towards the concept of "factors of influence." Some suggested prompts:



- What can you tell me about the character?
 - What can you tell me about the factors that many have influenced the character's food choices?
4. **Say:** Now I'm going to have you move to the next numbered scenario. Those at scenario 1 should move to 2, those at 2 should move to 3, those at 6 should move to 1, etc. **(Slide 7)**
- Read through and discuss the new scenario as well as the responses recorded by previous groups.
 - Add any other factors that you feel might have impacted the character's food choices to the flip chart paper. **(Slide 8)**
5. **Do:** Repeat Steps 3 and 4 every few minutes until each group has discussed three or four scenarios.

Move to the next flip chart paper.

Read through the food choice scenario. On the flip chart paper, brainstorm different factors that might influence your character's food choices.



Activity Wrap-Up (Sharing, Processing, and Generalizing)

1. **Say:** As a class, let's discuss the scenarios. **(Slide 9)** Can I have a volunteer at the first scenario read it to the class?
2. **Do:** Allow the volunteer to read the scenario to the class.
3. **Say:** Let's discuss the scenario. What were some of factors that were brainstormed and some of the observations you had?
4. **Do:** Repeat Steps 2 and 3 for each scenario.
5. **Do:** Follow the group's line of thinking, and if necessary, ask more targeted questions.
 - Explain what you observed about the different influences.
 - Explain the similarities and differences in food choices.
 - Explain the differences and similarities between how children versus adults made decisions in these scenarios.
 - Explain how these different factors of influences might impact what a student chooses in the lunch line.
 - Explain how we could make changes to the environment of the lunchroom to influence choices.


Activity Wrap-Up

Facilitator Tip: If there are any misconceptions remaining in this phase of the lesson, you should address these now.



Concept and Term Discovery/Introduction

Over the course of the lesson, participants should be able to identify the following concepts:

- A variety of factors influence an individual's food choices.
- Some influences might affect just one person, or may impact many.

- There are differences and similarities between what motivates children versus adults to make certain food choices.
- Environmental factors may influence choices.
- Changing the environment is a strategy to encourage healthier choices.

The following key vocabulary terms should be discovered by participants or introduced to them: factors of influence, individual factors, and environmental factors.



6.2: Expanding Knowledge

Getting Ready



Time Required

10 minutes



Materials Needed

(*Materials provided in the curriculum)

- **Focus on Food Lesson 6* (PowerPoint)
- PowerPoint Projector
- Computer



Preparation

1. Connect laptop to projector. Load *Focus on Food Lesson 6* PowerPoint.
2. Queue the PowerPoint presentation to Slide 10.



Procedure

1. Go through the Expanding Knowledge presentation slide by slide. The following script is available for use if you so choose.



Expanding Knowledge

Lesson 6: Understanding Influences on Food Choices

Slide 10

Slide 10

Now let's review some concepts that we learned in Lesson 6, understanding Influences on Food Choices.

Food Choices

- Individuals make food choices for a variety of reasons.
 - Taste
 - Health
 - Convenience
 - Price
- In addition to more noticeable influences, there are also less obvious ways that the world around us can impact choices.

Lesson 6: Understanding Influences on Food Choices

Slide 11

Slide 11

Individuals make food choices for a variety of reasons, including, but not limited to: Taste, Health, Convenience, and Price. In addition to more noticeable influences, there are also less obvious ways that the world around us can impact choices. What are some influences you can think of?

[Pause to allow responses from the class.]

Personal Factors

- Factors that are different from person to person.
- Examples: taste preferences, genetics, age, knowledge, and health.
- What are some other factors that vary from person to person?

Lesson 6: Understanding Influences on Food Choices

Slide 12

Slide 12

Let's begin by discussing some personal factors that may impact food choices. Personal factors are defined as factors that are different from person to person. We can also call them individual factors. Some examples include taste preferences, genes, age, knowledge, and health. What are some other factors that vary from person to person?

[Pause to allow responses from the class.]

Environmental Factors

- Aspects of a setting, atmosphere, or location that influence an individual's choices.
- Examples: Layout, marketing, climate, weather, price, and availability
- What are some environmental factors from the scenarios in the activity?

Lesson 6: Understanding Influences on Food Choices

Slide 13

Slide 13

Environmental factors can also have an influence on our food choices. These are aspects of a setting, atmosphere, or location that influence an individual's choices. Layout, marketing, climate, weather, price, and availability are examples of environmental factors. What are some other environmental factors?

[Pause to allow responses from the class.]

Example of Different Influences



- Matt and his daughter Gina are at a family barbecue.
- Matt chose to eat spicy chicken wings and carrot salad. He avoids the green salad, because it contains cilantro.
- Matt selects a plate of food for Gina. Gina eats a hot dog (but not the bun) and some fruit salad. She picks out all the honeydew and only eats the watermelon, grapes, and strawberries.

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Slide 14

Slide 14

Let's go over an example. Matt and his daughter Gina are at a family barbecue. Matt chose to eat spicy chicken wings and carrot salad. He avoids the green salad, because it contains cilantro. Matt selects a plate of food for Gina. Gina eats a hot dog (but not the bun) and some fruit salad. She picks out all the honeydew and only eats the watermelon, grapes, and strawberries. Now let's discuss some examples of factors that may have influenced Matt and Gina's food choices.

What do you think might have influenced their choices?

[Pause to allow responses from the class.]

Personal Factors

Taste preferences:
Hates spicy food, loves watermelon and strawberries.

Age:
At the age where children are typically resistant to trying new foods.

Personal knowledge:
Has heard that some foods help you run fast.

Genetic factors:
Has a gene that makes cilantro taste bad.



Taste preferences:
Loves spicy food, hates cilantro.

Hunger:
Didn't eat breakfast and is very hungry by lunchtime.

Health factors:
Allergic to strawberries.

Personal knowledge:
Knows that carrots are good source of vitamin A.

Genetic factors:
Has a gene that makes cilantro taste bad.

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Slide 15

Slide 15

Let's look at personal factors impacting Gina's food choices: Let's begin with her taste preferences: Gina hates spicy food, loves watermelon and strawberries. The fact that she is at the age where children are typically resistant to trying new foods may also be a factor that influences her food choices. Some personal knowledge may also have an influence on her food choice. For example, Gina has heard that some foods help you run fast, which might make her want to eat these foods. An example of a genetic factors that may impact her food choice is the fact that Gina has a gene that makes cilantro taste bad. Now let's look at personal factors impacting Matt's food choices: Let's begin with his taste preferences: Matt loves spicy food, hates cilantro.

The fact that he didn't eat breakfast and is very hungry by lunchtime most likely also impacted his food choices. Some personal knowledge may also have an influence on his food choice. For example, Matt knows that carrots are good source of vitamin A. An example of a genetic factor that may impact his food choice is the fact that Matt, like Gina, has a gene that makes cilantro taste bad.

Environmental Factors

Agriculture:
Watermelon and strawberries are in season.

Placement:
All of the food is laid out on a single table. There is one long line to get food.

Time:
Matt hurries when selecting food since others are waiting and Gina is hungry.



Setting:
The barbecue is at a park. Gina rushes to eat her lunch, so she can play on the playground equipment.

Park rules:
Glass containers are prohibited, so Matt brings canned beverages.

Weather:
88 degrees, humid.

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Slide 16

Slide 16

Now let's take a look at environmental factors impacting Gina and Matt's food choices: There may be some **agriculture** factors that influenced Gina & Matt's choices. For example, watermelon and strawberries are in season. The **placement** of food can also be an environmental factor. For example, all of the food is laid out on a single table. There is one long line to get food. **Time** is another factor. For example: Matt hurries when selecting food since others are waiting and Gina is hungry. **The setting** of the BBQ may also influence choice. For example, the barbecue is at a park & Gina rushes to eat her lunch, so she can play on the playground equipment. **Park rules** may also be a factor. For example, glass containers are prohibited, so Matt brings canned beverages. Finally, **Weather** may be a factor: The fact that it is 88 degrees and humid are environmental factor that most likely will affect Matt and Gina's food choices.

Factors Changing Over Time

- Many of these influences are not set in stone.
- Even personal taste preferences can change.
- What are some examples of the way influences on our food choices can change over time?

Lesson 6: Understanding Influences on Food Choices

Slide 17

Slide 17

It is important to note that many of these influences are not set in stone. Even personal taste preferences can change. What are some examples of the way influences on our food choices can change over time?

[Pause to allow responses from the class.]

Why does this matter?

- By being more aware of environmental and personal factors, we can make smarter choices.

Lesson 6: Understanding Influences on Food Choices

Slide 18

Slide 18

Why does this matter? By being more aware of environmental and personal factors, we can make smarter choices.

Using Environmental Factors

- Some of these can be very simple changes.
- At the barbecue Matt and Gina attended, the line for food was very long.
- Matt may not have been making the best choices because he was rushed.
- How could the food have been arranged differently to encourage smarter choices?

Lesson 6: Understanding Influences on Food Choices

Slide 19

Slide 19

Let's go over some examples of how we can use environmental factors to improve food choices. If you remember the food at the BBQ that Matt and Gina attended was served on one long table, Matt may not have been making the best choices because he was rushed to get through the line. How could the food have been arranged differently to encourage smarter choices?

[Pause to allow responses to the class.]



6.3: Goal Setting Activity

Getting Ready



Time Required

5 minutes



Materials Needed

(*Materials provided in the curriculum)

- *Goal Setting: Understanding Influences on Food Choices (Appendix 6B)

Optional:

- *Focus on Food Lesson 6 Newsletter (Appendix 6C)
- *Focus on Food Lesson 6 (PowerPoint)
- PowerPoint Projector
- Computer

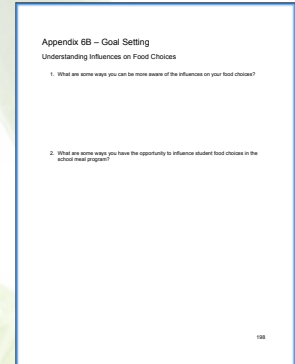


Preparation

1. Make copies of the *Goal Setting: Understanding Influences on Food Choices Handout* (Appendix 6B), one for each participant.

Optional:

2. Make copies of the *Focus on Food Lesson 6 Newsletter* (Appendix 6C), one for each participant.
3. Connect laptop to projector. Load *Focus on Food Lesson 6* (PowerPoint).
4. Queue the PowerPoint Presentation to Slide 20.





Procedure (Experiencing)

1. **Say:** Now let's move on to Goal Setting! **(Slide 20)** We've talked about how a variety of factors can influence our food choices. The next step is to set some goals and make a plan. I am going to distribute a Goal Setting Handout that has the following questions: **(Slide 21)**

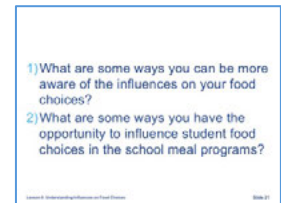
- 1) What are some ways you can be more aware of the influences on your food choices?
- 2) What are some ways you have the opportunity to influence student food choices in the school meal program?

2. **Do:** Provide a copy of the *Goal Setting: Understanding Influences on Food Choices* Handout (Appendix 6B) to each participant. Allow participants a few minutes to complete the handout.

3. **Say:** Would anyone like to share the goals they set for themselves?

Optional:

4. **Say:** I'm going to distribute one last handout, which is a newsletter with some extra information you might be interested in. Thank you all for participating in Lesson 6! **(Slide 41)**
5. **Do:** Provide a copy of the *Focus on Food Lesson 6 Newsletter* (Appendix 6C) to each participant.



Appendix 6A – Food Choice Scenarios

1. Food Choice Scenario – Joanna

Joanna is a 35-year-old woman living in sunny Arizona. After a long and stressful day at work, she hops in her car and blasts the A/C. Her car thermometer reads 108° F. On her way home she decides to stop by the self-serve food bar at the local supermarket. Her food options include meatloaf and mashed potatoes (\$5), vegetable barley soup (\$3), or a fresh Chinese chicken salad (\$5). Her beverage choices include hot coffee (\$2), bottled water (\$1), or ice-cold lemonade (\$1.50). She selects the salad and lemonade. As she is paying for her meal at the check-out counter, she spots a double chocolate brownie (\$1) and decides to purchase that, too.

What factors could have influenced Joanna's choices for dinner?

2. Food Choice Scenario – Maria

Maria is 11-years-old and in sixth grade. One of her favorite activities is to play a trading card game about magical animals with her friends during the 20-minute lunch period. There are three lunch lines in the cafeteria. The first two lines each have a salad bar, followed by hot food choices. In these lines, students have a choice of two entrée selections, several different sides, and non-fat chocolate milk or low-fat white milk. One of today's entrée selections is pepperoni pizza, Maria's favorite. The third line is a grab-and-go line. This line serves Southwest spinach salad topped with diced chicken, corn, peppers, and black beans. The salad comes packaged with a whole-grain roll, an apple, and low-fat white milk. Maria sees that the grab-and-go line is the shortest, and chooses this one. Once she has her lunch, she hurries to join her friends.

What factors could have influenced Maria's choices for lunch?

3. Food Choice Scenario – Conner

Conner is a 19-year-old Jewish college student living in New York. His alarm clock goes off at 7am. After hitting the snooze button three times, he rolls out of bed and gets ready for his morning class at the university. Bundled up in his warmest winter coat, Conner decides to stop by the local convenience store to pick up something to eat on his way to class. His breakfast choices include a ham and cheese breakfast sandwich (\$3), an egg and pancake platter (\$5), a fruit and yogurt parfait (\$3), or a donut (\$1). His beverage selections include chocolate milk (\$1), water (\$1), and coffee (\$1). Conner purchases the coffee and a donut and rushes to class.

What factors could have influenced Conner's choices for breakfast?

4. Food Choice Scenario – Joey

Joey is a five-year-old boy. His favorite commercial stars a panda bear that loves to eat peanut butter and chocolate flavored cereal. One evening, Joey gets dropped off at his grandma's house. His grandma is tired and is not feeling very well, so she lets Joey select anything he wants from the pantry for dinner. The pantry is full of items such as trail mix, vegetable soup, granola bars, instant macaroni and cheese, canned salmon, peanut butter and jelly, and a wide selection of cereals. Joey selects the peanut butter and chocolate flavored cereal for dinner.

What factors could have influenced Joey's choices for dinner?

5. Food Choice Scenario – Daniel

Daniel is a 42-year-old father of four children under ten who makes a modest salary for a living. It is his night to take care of the children, including selecting what restaurant they will eat at for dinner. The family dinner choices include a taco special that includes two tacos and a free quesadilla with the purchase of a large drink at a fast food restaurant (\$5), an all-you-can-eat sushi buffet meal at a sit-down restaurant (\$20), or a complete fresh fish meal including the catch of the day, jasmine brown rice with herbs, grilled local vegetables, and bottomless strawberry infused water (\$25). Daniel chooses the taco place for his family.

What factors could have influenced Daniel's choices for his family dinner?

6. Food Choice Scenario – Fatima

Fatima is a 23-year-old woman that happens to be lactose-intolerant. She is excited for her trip to Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. During her taxi-ride to the airport, Fatima sees a billboard with a famous super model advertising a luxury shoe company. While waiting for her flight, she flips through her fashion magazine filled with slim models. Lunchtime arrives and she decides to buy lunch at the airport. Her lunch choices include a burger and fries (\$9), a small greek salad with low-fat cheese (\$12), a fruit and yogurt parfait (\$6), or a weight loss bar (\$4). Fatima purchases the weight loss bar for lunch.

What factors could have influenced Fatima's choices for lunch?

Appendix 6B – Goal Setting

Understanding Influences on Food Choices

1. What are some ways you can be more aware of the influences on your food choices?

2. What are some ways you have the opportunity to influence student food choices in the school meal program?

Appendix 6C – Focus on Food Lesson 6 Newsletter

The optional newsletter on the following pages is designed to help reinforce the concepts learned. If offering this course in a single workshop, you may wish to distribute the lesson newsletters weekly in order to help refresh participants' memory and solidify the concepts.

Understanding Influences on Food Choices

In this issue...

Personal Factors	Page 2
Environmental Factors	Page 3
How Do Restaurants Use These Concepts to Influence Choices?	Page 3
But What About the Lunchroom?	Page 4
Which Factors Have More of an Influence on You: Personal or Environmental? Take our Quiz to Find Out!	Page 5



Factor This

You may not notice them, but there are several factors of influence that come into play while you're making decisions every day. Certain factors are especially important when you're making food choices. Think about the last thing you ate. Why did you eat it? Were you extra hungry? Was that food item the most convenient because you were in a hurry? Did you see an advertisement that made you want a certain food? Or was it something else? Understanding the different factors, **personal** and **environmental**, that influence our food choices will help you understand why we choose to eat certain foods.

Turn the page to learn more about factors of influence!

Did you know?

Even our genes have an influence on the food choices we make. Some foods taste yummy to some people, but bitter to others. Although this does not account for the majority of taste preferences, it does play a role in why there are certain foods some people just don't like.

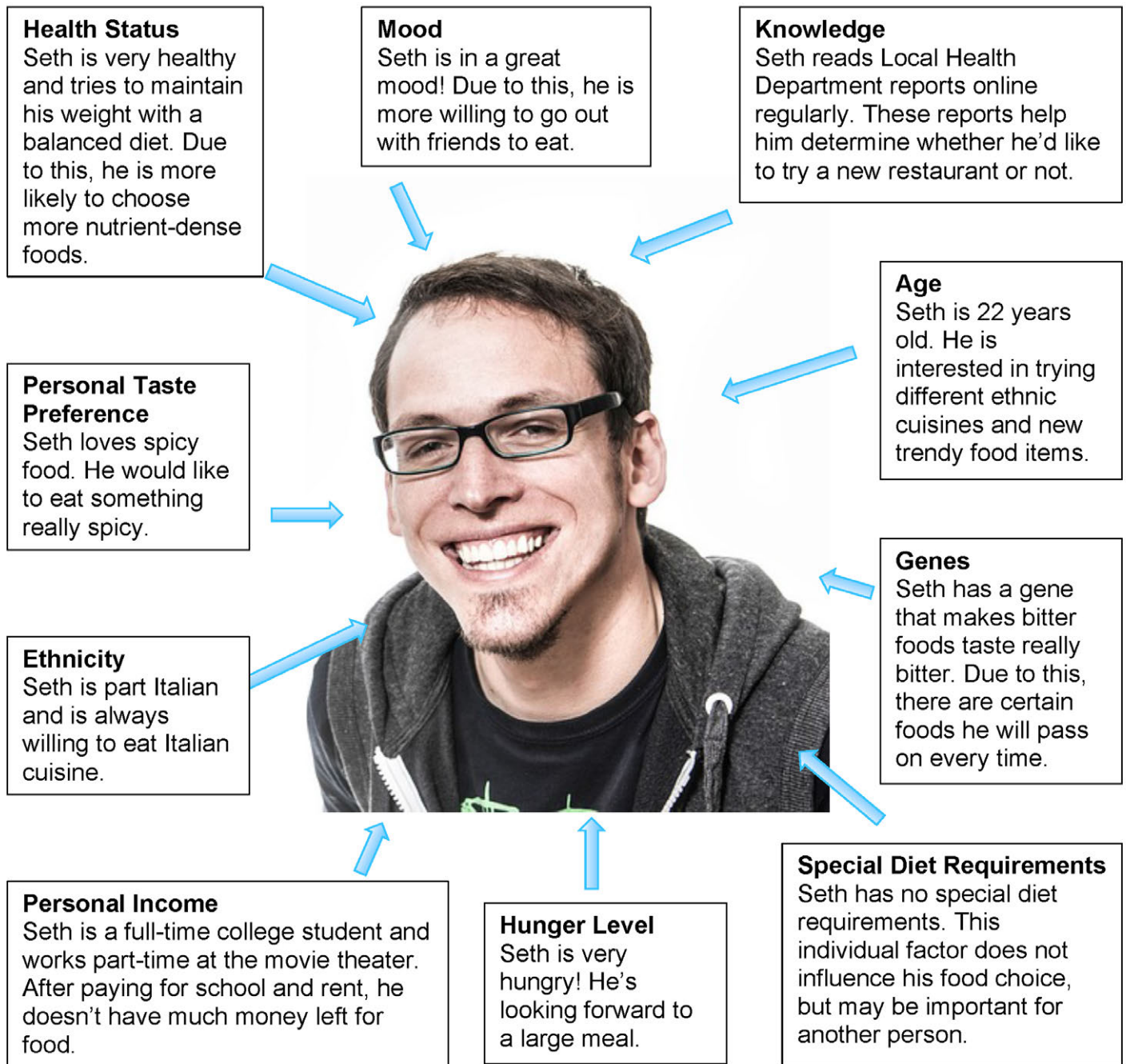


Try it yourself!

Did you know using a smaller plate might help to eat less? Research shows that people take and eat less food when using a smaller plate compared to a bigger one!

Personal Factors

Personal factors influence food choices differently from person to person. There may be one factor, such as knowledge, that is very important to one person, but does not matter to another person. The variability in what can influence food choices at the individual level is something that helps make us unique from one another. Below is an example of how personal factors influence Seth's food choices.



Environmental Factors

Environmental factors influence food choices a little differently than individual factors because they can apply to each person or to an entire group of people. Also, environmental factors may influence your food choices without you even realizing it. Below are a few examples of different environmental factors.

Can you think of any others?

Weather

Ever crave ice cream on a hot day? What about a warm bowl of soup when it's cold? These food choices are influenced by the weather.



Ambiance

The ambiance of a location may also influence if you choose to eat there. For a special occasion, do you want an elegant candle lit dinner or something more casual?

Government Policies

Government policies can directly affect other factors which in turn can influence food choices. For example, government policies might influence the cost of raw materials which could alter prices. The resulting changes in price could influence food purchases.



Availability

Sometimes the food you actually want may not be available. You will then have to decide to either make a substitution or not have that food at all. On the other hand, there are food items, such as apples, that tend to regularly be available. Knowing that you can almost always get a food item may influence your decision as well.



How do restaurants use these concepts to influence choices?

Although some factors of influence may be more easily identified as environmental, like weather or climate, others may surprise you.

For example, a buffet-style restaurant might strategically place items in a certain order knowing that people will tend to take more of the first few items. The restaurant could use this layout to put lower cost items in the front and higher cost items in the back of the buffet.

But What About the Lunchroom?

Students have several choices in the lunchroom. Examples of the factors that may play a role in their decision-making in the lunchroom are highlighted below.



Length of the serving line

The length of the serving line may influence a student's food choice. A student in a rush may opt for the shortest line while a student whose favorite food is being served may be willing to wait in a longer line.



Presence of colorful fruits and vegetables on the salad bar

Visual appeal is very important to students. Fruits and vegetables that are colorful and look fresh may draw more students to the salad bar.

Time available for purchasing and consuming the meal

Time plays a role in students' food choices in the lunchroom. Some students may want to purchase and eat lunch as soon as possible to get out to recess faster. Other students may want to purchase their food quickly in order to have more time to consume the meal.





Which Factors Have More of an Influence on You: Personal or Environmental? Take our Quiz to Find Out!

The Results are In!

Total up the number of A's and B's that you selected.

If you chose mostly A's:

Your food choices are more influenced by personal factors than by environmental factors. For a review of individual factors, see page 2.

If you chose mostly B's:

Your food choices are more influenced by environmental factors than by personal factors. For a review of environmental factors, see page 3.

If you chose the same number of A's and B's:

Your food choices are equally influenced by individual and environmental factors.

1. Your favorite food is your favorite because...
 - a. It reminds you of something you ate growing up.
 - b. It is always easy to find.
2. There are certain foods you eat because...
 - a. They are healthy and nutrient-dense.
 - b. You saw an advertisement on TV for them.
3. When figuring out what to eat, the most important thing is...
 - a. The taste of the food.
 - b. How much time you have to eat the food.
4. You buy local produce because...
 - a. It is cheaper and you're on a budget.
 - b. It supports local farms and agriculture.



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(1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;

(2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or

(3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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