

Introduction to Cultural Aspects of Food

I. Introduction

A. Definition of culture – complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, custom. Food and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society and is multidisciplinary

B. Characteristics

1. learned
2. transmitted from one generation to another
3. transmitted formally/informally
4. group phenomenon
5. symbolic
6. value system
 - a. ideological
 - b. technological
 - c. economic
 - d. educational
 - e. political
 - f. family
 - g. mass media

C. Changing cultural patterns

1. family structure fragmented and contracted
2. expanded food supply
3. revived ethnic cuisine interest
4. preoccupation with health and fitness
5. increased communication and technology

D. Assimilation – when people from one cultural group shed their ethnic identity and fully merge into the majority culture

E. Enculturation – culture being passed through language acquisition and socialization from generation to generation

F. Acculturation

1. process by which groups and individuals adapt to the norms and values of an alien society
2. model of acculturation

G. Nutritional Anthropology – study of the interrelationship between diet and culture and the mutual influence upon one another

H. Resistance to change

1. greater the perceived relative advantage , more rapid adoption
2. compatibility
3. complexity
4. trialability
5. observability

II. Food Habits

A. Definition – the ways in which humans use food, including how food is obtained and stored, how it is prepared, how it is served and to whom and how it is consumed

B. Self-expression

1. vegetarian
2. gourmet
3. health food
4. synthetic food

C. Socialization – teaches social, cultural and psychological meanings of food

1. primary socialization – acquired early in life by immediate family and generally long lasting and resistant to change
2. re-socialization – occurs through educational and intervention programs

D. Categorizations of food

1. United States – food group, percentage of important nutrients or recommendations for health
2. Developing countries – cultural superfoods (usually staples); prestige foods (expensive or rare); body image foods (influence health, beauty and well-being); sympathetic magic foods (traits through association of color or form are incorporated); and physiologic group foods (reserved for or forbidden based on gender, age, or health condition).
3. Researchers
 - Frequency of food consumption such as core, secondary or peripheral foods
 - Flavor principles
 - Meal patterns and meal cycles
 - Developmental perspective of food culture
4. Other
 - Fuel
 - Convenience
 - Medicine
 - Social bond
 - Mood regulator
 - Alienation
 - Future food