

Fact Sheet 10 Factors that affect food choices for migrants

The history of a person's eating pattern and habits is so ingrained in everyday life that it can be difficult to express. It is important to consider the influences affecting an individual's food choices to understand their background.

Different cultures may encourage or frown upon consumption of different foods by individuals who belong to their groups. Different foods may be actively encouraged or discouraged for people of different ages. For example, most cultures do not approve of the consumption of alcohol during pregnancy or lactation.

Patterns of eating, including for whom and by whom the food is made, affect food choices. For example, in some cultures foods tend to be prepared for a large number of people at regular times of the day. In other cultures, food may be prepared less frequently during the day and the same meal may be eaten more than. Some people may cook different meals for children rather than the whole family eating the same meal.

Socio-economic status eg in a family where there is no regular income only essential foods may be bought, only once a week and from local shops and markets. Where there is a higher income a family might shop more often and at larger supermarkets.

Mood and individual personality. When people are more positive it is easier to search for appropriate foods and interesting recipes and prepare more nutritious meals.

Geographical factors such as where people live and the range of shops situated near them may influence their choice of foods.

Age of the individual. Children may not actually be able to make choices, with the choices being made by adults who care for them. Children may also not have sufficient knowledge to make good food choices. There is some evidence that the growing body of an adolescent prompts them to make food choices that are higher in fat. Older people who have experienced a life event such as a stroke or heart attack may make different food choices based on their perception of its value to their health.

The style and manner of upbringing affects outlook and attitudes towards life and people, health and food choices. For example, an Indian family may consume meals composed of many vegetables, no meat and a lot of herbs and spices. An Irish family might have a good balance of fruit and vegetables but tend to eat a diet with very little variation. Someone from one place, raised in another and then migrating to Australia, may blend food and food preparation techniques.

Allergies or intolerances Lactose intolerance and nut and nut oil product allergies are increasingly common in Australia.

Factors that affect food and food choices for migrants include:

- Background – where did they come from?
- Migration pathway – did they come straight here or spend time in another country?
- Was it a choice to migrate or forced migration?
- How old were they?
- Did they have children?
- How old are the children?
- Can they speak the language?
- What is their level of education?
- Are they able to work?
- Do they work outside of the home?
- Are there other community members here?
- Can they access that community?
- Are there other family members?
- Are familiar foods available?
- Are shopping facilities familiar?
- Are cooking facilities familiar?
- What is their income?
- What are the pressures to conform?
- Do specific cultural foods have different cultural values?
- Can you think of others?