

# Understanding Influences on Food Choices

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## 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.



## 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!*

## 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 Justin's food choices.

## Health Status

Justin is very healthy and tries to maintain his weight with a balanced diet. Due to this, he is more likely to choose more nutrient-dense foods.

## Mood

Justin is in a great mood! Due to this, he is more willing to go out with friends to eat.

## Knowledge

Justin reads Local Health Department reports online regularly. These reports help him determine whether he'd like to try a new restaurant or not.

## Age

Justin is 22 years old. He is interested in trying different ethnic cuisines and new trendy food items.

## Genes

Justin has a gene that makes bitter foods taste really bitter. Due to this, there are certain foods he will pass on every time.



## Personal Income

Justin is a full-time college student and works part-time at the movie theater. After paying for school and rent, he doesn't have much money left for food.

## Special Diet Requirements

Justin has no special diet requirements. This individual factor does not influence his food choice, but may be important for another person.

## Hunger Level

Justin is very hungry! He's looking forward to a large meal.

## Ethnicity

Justin is part Italian and is always willing to eat Italian cuisine.

## Personal Taste Preference

Justin loves spicy food. He would like to eat something really spicy.

# 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

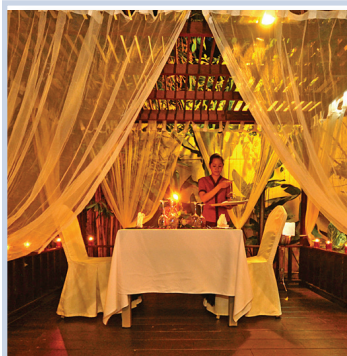
Ever crave ice cream on a hot day? What about a warm bowl of soup when it's cold?

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 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!

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.



## 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.

