

# FOOD ATTITUDES

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**Purpose:** To help participants become aware of their eating habits, food preferences and the different forces that influence what foods they choose.

**Introduction:** *For many of us, eating is something we do automatically, without much thought -- like walking and breathing. It is a habit. But there are lots of reasons why we choose one food instead of another food, or why we eat what we eat when we eat it. This program will explore the foods we like to eat and don't like to eat, why we have these food likes and dislikes, and how that might affect on our nutrition and health.*

Ask participants to think about the foods they usually eat and what they usually drink. If you will be meeting with participants again, plan to conduct a 24-hour food recall.

Ask participants the questions listed below. Make sure everyone has a chance to respond. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers. Use a flip chart, blackboard or blank transparency on an overhead projector to write down responses. Ask the questions one at a time, making a list of the different responses for each question.

If you are working with a large group and time is limited, have participants work in teams of two or three and discuss these questions with their teams. Then, ask for teams to share some of their responses.

What food(s) do you eat every day?

What is your favorite food?

What is a food that you really dislike?



**Discussion:** Is your favorite food one that you eat every day? Why or why not? What are some common favorite foods and disliked foods?

*NOTE: Quite often, someone's favorite food is someone else's disliked food! This makes it very important to recognize and understand that everyone does not like the same foods we like, and that our food preferences can be an important part of who we are.*

Can someone share the reason why they really like or really dislike a food?

This part of the discussion is very important, so make sure to give people a chance to speak if they want to. Many people have wonderful stories about food likes or dislikes. Here is an idea for discussion if people are not responding.

*From the first time we were fed as babies, food has taken on special meanings. Every experience we have had with food as we've grown has made a difference in our attitudes, or how we feel, about food.*

*For example, maybe the first time you ate corn on the cob, you had a loose tooth, and it hurt. So now you don't like corn on the cob. Or maybe you were coming down with the flu when you ate sweet potatoes; you got sick;*

*and now you don't like sweet potatoes thinking that they will make you sick. Or maybe your grandfather loved meatballs, so now meatballs are one of your favorite foods. Or maybe your mother made you a special dessert when you fell down and scraped your knee, and now that dessert makes you feel better when your life is not going right.*

Discussion points -- Everyone has feelings about foods, foods they especially like and foods they don't like at all. These attitudes about food help make you who you are.

In general, why do you eat the foods you eat? When you can choose between one food and another, why do you choose the foods you choose? What influences your food choice? (Give participants a chance to think about this. List responses on a separate sheet or clean slate.)

*Reasons why people choose foods:*

**TASTE** -- texture, sweet, sour, just like it!,

**APPEARANCE** -- how the food looks, smells, is presented

**AVAILABILITY/ACCESS** -- the food is there, or not!

**FAMILY** -- Mother tells them what to eat; children insist on certain foods

**OTHER PEOPLE** -- friends, teacher, celebrities

**HABIT** -- the food is familiar and safe, they know what to expect

**ADVERTISING** -- TV commercials, in-store ads, magazines, billboards

**COST** -- cheap fast foods, budget constraints

**CONVENIENCE** -- food is ready to eat, available

**EASY TO FIX**

**CULTURE AND TRADITIONS** -- holidays, ethnic foods

**HEALTH, FITNESS, GROWTH**

**WEIGHT CONTROL** -- health or looks

**NUTRITION** -- to balance their diet; vitamins and minerals

**OTHER**

Once all the participants have given an idea, and you have made sure that all of the factors are listed, ask them:

Which reason is most important to them? (How many came up with the same reason? What was the most popular reason?)

Which reason do they think is most important to their children? Their families?

*NOTE: if this is a group of emergency food providers, ask which reason is most important to their customers?*

Can values or reasons change depending on the person and the situation?

Are they in control of what they eat? If not, who is? (family, TV, friends, advertising companies, emergency food programs, their own skills and knowledge!!)

What could they do to have more control over their own eating behaviors?

*NOTE: if this is a group of emergency food providers, ask them what it might feel like not having any control over the kinds of foods they eat.*

Are there any ways they would like to change in order to learn to like a wider variety of foods? Or to improve nutrition? Are they willing to try new foods?

*NOTE: if this is a group of emergency food providers, ask them how they might help to offer more variety and choice to customers. How could they improve the nutrition of the foods they offer? How might they help customers improve the nutrition of the foods they receive?*



Other ways to explore food attitudes:

- Use the food preference activity when teaching food groups in the Food Guide Pyramid. For example, show food models or real examples of foods from each group and ask about everyday foods, favorite foods and disliked foods. Discuss the importance of portion size, variety and moderation within each food group.
- Dream meal -- using food models or food pictures from magazines, ask participants to plan a meal that would be their ideal, including their favorite foods. It may not be a meal they would eat very often, or it might be what they eat all the time. Have them discuss their meals with each other and share why their meal is so special to them.
- Food collage -- using magazine pictures, ask participants to create a collage of what food means to them and include some of their most favorite and least favorite foods. You will need large sheets of paper, glue or tape, and scissors. Have crayons or markers available, too, so participants can get artistic!
- Cookbook -- ask participants to bring in a favorite recipe to share with others. Have people try a new recipe at home and report back. Did they follow the recipe? What adjustments did they make? How did they like it? Did their families like it? Discuss and record changes made in the recipes. Then compile the tested recipes into a cookbook, giving credit to the originator and anyone whose ideas were included.

- How do foods make me feel? Food is more than just something to eat. This activity can help people discover their feelings about foods. You might want to do this in place of the Food Attitudes activity, above.

Hand out paper and crayons to each participant. Or divide the group into six smaller groups. Give each group a piece of poster paper and some crayons. One person in each group will be the designer, and will draw on the paper. Have the participants draw the outline of their own body.

If each participant is making his or her own drawing, they should draw or write in the name of a food that makes them feel the following ways. If they are working in groups, each group will work on only one of the feelings, but everyone in the groups will name a food that fits that special feeling, and the designer will draw the foods inside the outline of the body. (You can write the feelings on the poster paper before handing it to the groups.)

1. What is my most favorite food?
2. What is a favorite food that other people think is weird?
3. What food makes me feel happy or comforted?
4. What food makes me feel healthy and strong?
5. What food reminds me of sharing time with other people?
6. What food do I hate and will not eat?

If each person has made a drawing, ask them to share some of the foods they chose and to explain why, if they can. If working in groups, have each designer bring their picture with all the foods choices from their group, up in front of the whole group.

Discussion:

Did any foods fit more than one type of feeling?

Do other people feel the same way about the foods?

Is someone's favorite food a food that someone else hates?

Did anyone have trouble finding a food to fit the feelings?

What are some of the reasons behind the feelings?

Why does someone hate a particular food, or why do they feel strong and healthy when they eat a certain food?

Finish this activity by talking about how we are all different when it comes to our feelings about foods, and the foods we like or don't like. Sometimes, however, our feelings about food get in the way of us enjoying lots of different foods that are important for our health. We can learn to like foods that we dislike, and even learn that eating our favorite food all the time may be a problem. It is important to enjoy the food we eat! It is important to eat foods that will help make us healthy. And it is important to be yourself!

*Ask participants to think about the foods they eat during the next few days. Why did they choose the foods they ate? How did they feel about the food? Ask them to talk about this with their families and friends, to find out what other people feel about food and why.*



*Notes: Write down participant comments. Include some of the ways participants want to change in order to have more control over their food choices, and to choose foods for better nutrition. This will help you plan future food and nutrition education programs with this audience.*

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