

# Personal Taste

## Summary

Taste and pleasure as overriding influences on food choices made by individuals and families.

## Materials

Any good food and nutrition book.

## Background for Teachers

Knowing the importance of good nutrition does not guarantee high quality nutrition decisions.

### THE PLEASURE PRINCIPLE

*"In matters of taste, consider nutrition. In matters of nutrition, consider taste."*

-- Carole Lalli, Editor in Chief Food and Wine Magazine

Individual needs must be considered to maintain benefits of good nutrition, but personal preferences must also be considered. Good lifelong dietary habits depend on food that is beneficial for us, but usually we choose to eat something because it tastes good.

Unfortunately, humans do not eat foods because they are prescribed for them. In the majority of cases, we eat what we like. Simply put, fish oils, oats, and bran may not be eaten if we get no pleasure from eating them. We eat our bread and beans, or our hamburgers and our pizza because they taste good.

During the past decade awareness of nutrition has soared. Many people have switched to low-fat milk instead of whole milk, and to poultry and fish instead of red meat. But overall in the United States, we eat fewer eggs but more ice cream; we eat less steak but more salad dressing. As a nation, we have traded some types of fats and sugars for others, but across the board consumption of fat and sugar is not down. This is in spite of the fact that the average American's nutritional knowledge has almost doubled in the last decade.

Faulty diets, leading to poor nutrition, play a part in 5 out of the top 10 causes of death in the United States including cancer, kidney disease, diabetes, and heart diseases. People don't seem to know how much or what to give up. One of the characteristics of the U.S. culture is that people don't have time to eat properly. There may also be a feeling of helplessness as individuals try to cope with grams of fiber, milligrams of calcium, etc. Six easy rules can help:

- Eat a variety of food at regular meals, including breakfast.

- Don't snack between meals or choose healthy snacks between meals.

- Avoid alcoholic beverages.

- Exercise regularly.

- Don't smoke.

- Sleep seven or eight hours a night.

On the other hand, people may be eating lite and eating right but are not eating enough vegetables and whole grains. More to the point, people may know what should be eaten but in their daily food choices, they eat what satisfies. This is often food with high sugar and high fat content. That may be one reason Utah is the largest consumer of sugar in the United States. At any rate, high consumption of sugar and fat is a major source of malnutrition. Yet these foods satisfy appetites best and they also play a major role in any social event where food is important.

Excerpt from the editor of *Food and Wine*:

There is little food value per calories in most of the desserts served and eaten in the United States. Cakes, pastries, candies and other desserts signal special occasions or special preferences. Still we consume such foods, mostly because of personal likes (they taste good) and social reasons (entertaining, hospitality, graciousness, etc.). These are learned behaviors.

The way food looks and the way it smells also affect the way it seems to taste. Examples are the smell of onions on hamburgers, pumpkin pie, etc., or the colors of fruits and vegetables. Texture also affects taste. Sometimes it is the texture we don't like and not the actual taste, as in oily foods or grainy ice cream. More than anything else though, taste in food is learned.

People like what they are used to eating. A college student once confided to her roommate that she had never liked anybody's chocolate cake except her mother's. "I just realized," she said, "that my mother's chocolate cake is heavy and soggy. Most people do not make heavy, soggy cakes, but because I grew up eating my mom's cake, that is the only way I like it".

As they grow up children learn to like the flavors and textures of foods that they are exposed to and become familiar with. These are part of an individual's food culture. When a person is not used to foods, he/she can learn to like them by beginning to eat small amounts.

#### COOKING WITH AN EYE FOR COLOR

The way food looks on a plate is almost as important as how it tastes. Many times the appeal is in the color and texture, with the final result being the flavor. Using the color wheel can enhance a person's ability to prepare attractive meals. While some of the best color combinations come from pure imagination and creativity, there are some safe combinations which can be relied on.

Any colors directly opposite each other on the color wheel, such as red and green, are known as complementary colors. They always look good together because they intensify each other. The red tomatoes and green spinach that are often placed next to each other in the supermarket are an example.

Colors next to each other on the wheel, known as analogous colors, work well together because they share a common color. Yellow and green, for example, are analogous colors and often are seen together in the form of yellow lemon slices combined with green parsley for garnishes.

The other textbook color scheme is known as monochromatic, different values (light to dark ranges) of the same color. That's why a salad of mixed greens vary in color from light to dark green is more interesting and appealing than a salad with just one kind of green.

The simple law of contrast also plays an important part in putting together pleasing food color combinations. Anything light in color looks still lighter against a dark color background, and the opposite holds true, too. That's why a dollop of mayonnaise and a sprinkling of black caviar make a tomato slice look redder. Many garnishes are dark in value, such as ripe olives and deep green lettuce or parsley. These serve to lighten or brighten the food with which they are combined.

The laws of contrast and the color wheel pinpoint some food color combinations that look good together, but individual imagination can be used to come up with various color schemes. When choosing a garnish or putting together foods for a menu, remember that flavors should go together and should suit the character of the food. Baked green peppers stuffed with yellow corn and red tomatoes are pleasing\_\_\_baked green peppers stuffed with yellow grapefruit and red raspberries are not! Remember also that the flavor of garnishes or accompaniments should always complement the menu, never mask or overpower it. If it looks good together, it usually is.

Vegetables will have the prettiest, most vibrant colors if you start with fresh ones. (Frozen vegetables usually have fairly bright color, too.) Vegetables will also retain more color if cooked until crisp-tender rather than overcooking them, and more nutrients will be saved as well. Steaming or stir-frying will best preserve color and nutrients.

#### Instructional Procedures

#### LEARNING ACTIVITIES AND TEACHING STRATEGIES

##### OPTION #1

Have the students list their Top Ten best loved foods (or have them find pictures of them in magazines or food models). Using a [MYPYRAMID SORT](#), sort the foods into categories and determine where most of their favorite foods fall on the pyramid--near the base (low fat & sugar) or

near the tip (high added fat & sugar). Example: are they mostly meats, fruits, sugars and fats? Have the students then write a paragraph in their reflective notebook describing the relationship between how they look and feel and their favorite foods.

#### OPTION #2

Discuss with the students why foods taste differently to various people. Have the students taste test a variety of tuna, soda crackers, or other foods. Do not reveal brands. Have students identify salty, sour, oily, and sweet tastes. Vote for the best-liked. Ask why?

Discuss the importance of the texture, taste, appearance, etc. of foods that they eat.

#### OPTION #3

Prepare several dishes of foods cut into bite sizes. (Apple, carrot, onion, cabbage, orange, banana, etc.)

Ask for student volunteers to participate in an experiment. Blindfold the students and ask them to hold their noses while they taste the various food items. Ask them to identify by taste, texture, and smell, the samples of foods provided.

Discuss the what and the why factors that affect our taste buds. Ask the volunteer students the following questions:

Can you identify the foods by their tastes alone?

Can you identify the foods by their smells?

What did it take for you to finally identify the foods eaten?

#### OPTION #4

Assign each unit of students one vegetable that will be prepared in the following ways:

Each group will prepare fresh, canned, and frozen vegetables (if available) of the same variety\_\_\_example: carrots, green beans, corn, broccoli, etc.

Raw\_\_\_taste a sample of each vegetable.

Boil fresh vegetables in a small amount of water in a covered pan for a short period of time.

Boil fresh vegetable in a large amount of water in a covered pan for a long time.

Open a can of vegetables and heat to boiling in a covered pan.

Prepare frozen vegetables according to package instructions\_\_\_microwave if applicable.

Have the students label and display their vegetables. Have the students evaluate the products using the [EYE AND TASTE APPEAL](#) worksheet. Compare color, flavor and texture of each and make a conclusion on preparation methods and how they affect the eye appeal and taste.

#### OPTION #5

Have each unit of students plan a dinner menu that has appeal to the following: color, texture, flavor or taste, shape, appearance, and variety. Have them evaluate the menu by using [MENU ANALYSIS](#).

#### Authors

[Utah LessonPlans](#)