

Identifying the Messages You Have Received About Food

Objective

To identify the messages you have received about food and to determine how they affect your present-day eating habits.

You Should Know

Your most basic messages about food came from your childhood. Your parents may have talked to you about your eating habits, but you most likely learned by simply watching the adults around you. Hopefully, you learned some positive, common-sense rules about food and eating, like eating in moderation and maintaining a healthy and balanced diet. You may also have received some messages that were not helpful and contributed to the development of poor eating habits, like eating sweets to reward yourself or eating carbohydrate-loaded “comfort food” when you are upset.

The culture you grew up in also sent you messages about food and your eating habits. Some cultures have a tradition of over-indulging with food. Other cultures have favorite foods which are high in calories and fat. Some cultures have diets that are lower in fat and sugar and, not surprisingly, the people from these cultures live longer and healthier lives.

However, early influences are not the only thing that affect your eating habits. Recent research at Harvard University has shown that your social circle—the people you interact with on a daily basis—can dramatically impact your own health and fitness. In fact, just having a close friend who is obese raises your own risk by 57 percent.

Finally, there are the constant messages you get from the media which can affect your attitude about eating and food. Every commercial you see advertising fast food features attractive, thin people having a great time enjoying their food. Advertisers spend lots of time and money researching how to get you to buy their products or go to their restaurants, and the messages are often misleading.

This worksheet will help you identify the messages you received about food at an early age and the ones you are continuing to get on a daily basis.

Once you acknowledge these messages, you can identify the ones that are unhealthy and learn to ignore them in favor of more conscious and nutritious eating habits.

Reflections on This Exercise

What do you think was the most significant message from your childhood that has influenced the way you eat today?

What do you think is the most significant message from the culture you are from that has influenced the way you eat today?

What do you think was the most significant message from your social group that has influenced the way you eat today?

What do you think was the most significant message from the media that has influenced the way you eat today?

Now that you have identified these messages, describe what you can do to develop more conscious and nutritious eating habits.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?
