Imagine ...

... that your Saturday job is bagging groceries at the supermarket. One customer buys 20 cans of mushroom soup and a package of cut-up chicken. The next person in line has a cart full of salad greens and an assortment of fresh vegetables and fruits. As you work, you wonder what meals these shoppers have in mind.

Think About

- How would working around food impact your food choices?
- Does your knowledge about nutrition enable you to make good choices?
- If you were in charge of meal plans for your family, how would you decide what to cook every day?
- How does eating breakfast affect your school day?
WHAT INFLUENCES FOOD CHOICES?

Have you ever thought about why you and your family eat certain foods? Some of the following factors have probably influenced the way you feel about food.

- **Family and culture.** A lot of people tend to follow their family's traditional food customs.
- **Friends.** Eating is a social event. When you go out with friends, you’re all likely to eat the same foods.
- **Religious beliefs.** Many of the world's religions give guidelines on food and eating.
- **Emotions.** People often associate certain foods with feelings of comfort or love.
- **Geographical area.** Different regions or countries often feature their own food traditions.
- **Advertising.** Food-related businesses spend millions of dollars each year to convince you to buy their products.
- **Lifestyle.** The amount of time you have for meals and how important good health is to you make a difference in the foods you choose.
- **Technology.** Whether you are ordering groceries or take-out on the Internet or baking pumpkin bread from a mix, technology is affecting your choices. Have you tried using the computer to track how nutritiously you eat or to download new recipes?

GETTING THE FACTS

When the topic of food comes up, should you believe all of the claims made? How would you evaluate the following statements?

- An apple a day keeps the doctor away.
- We're born with a preference for rich, fatty foods.
- Health food stores have the healthiest foods.
- Eating before a test fuels the brain.
Food Myths

You’ve probably heard many myths in your lifetime. A myth is an untrue statement that people believe.

The previous statements about apples, fatty foods, and health foods are myths. What are the facts? Eating before a test does fuel the brain—that is no myth!
• Apples are a low-calorie, high-fiber snack food. Eating one every day isn’t a bad idea, but it won’t prevent illness.
• Preference for fat is actually acquired.
• “Health food” printed on a package doesn’t necessarily mean that what’s inside is healthful. You can find nutritious foods in supermarkets and foods with little nutritional value in health food stores.

Questions to Ask

You get information about food and nutrition from many sources. However, not all sources of information are reliable. How can you be sure you’re getting the facts? Here are some questions you can ask:
• Who wrote or made the statement? What are the person’s qualifications in regard to nutrition?
• Why was the statement made? Is balanced coverage given? Was this meant to advertise or inform?
• Are the claims supported by credible or believable sources such as a government agency or health organization?
• What do registered dietitians or doctors say?

Health Foods

Have you ever wondered what the terms “good for you” and “healthy” mean? Many “health” foods aren’t any more or less nutritious than regular food products.
Before you buy a product, read the label carefully. Compare it with other products. Then decide whether the product is worth the extra cost.
Dietary Supplements

You probably know people who take vitamins every day. Maybe you've heard people debate the pros and cons of taking vitamins. You may have wondered who was right.

Most health experts agree that you don't need a daily vitamin or mineral supplement if you eat a variety of foods from the pyramid. An exception may be if a physician recommends taking a supplement because of a health condition.

Some people think that taking mega-doses, or large amounts, of a vitamin or mineral will cure disease. This isn't only untrue, it's often dangerous. Taking too much of any nutrient can be harmful.

Food Additives

Why does the oil separate from some peanut butters and not from others? What makes ice cream so smooth and creamy? The answer lies in additives, or substances added to food for a specific purpose.

Additives keep peanut butter from separating and ice cream smooth. They're also used to boost the nutritional value of popular foods and increase freshness. All additives must pass rigid governmental tests for safety.
Irradiated Foods

Some stores advertise irradiated foods. These foods have gone through a process that destroys bacteria, mold, and insects by passing them through a field of radiant energy similar to x-rays. This process makes foods safer to eat and maintains the quality of foods. It also extends the shelf life of these foods. Irradiated foods are just as nutritious as foods that aren’t irradiated. Irradiated foods must be labeled on the package according to law.

The irradiation process is controversial. Many believe that irradiated food is radioactive. However, this isn’t the case. Most of the radiant energy used in food passes through the food, in much the same way as microwaves pass through food.

TRY IT OUT

How Preservatives Affect Food

What You’ll Need
- 1 slice store-bought bread
- 1 slice homemade bread
- 2 plates, 2 labels, and plastic wrap

What to Do
1. Place each slice of bread on a plate. Label and date each plate and cover with plastic wrap. Leave out at room temperature.
2. Observe the bread slices daily. Record the date that mold appears on each slice of bread.

To Discuss
- How many days did it take for mold to appear on each slice of bread?
- What preservatives are listed on the store bread label?
- What conclusions can you draw about the value of preservatives to the food supply?
Avoiding Dehydration
When you exercise, you sweat or lose body fluids. You need to replace body fluids by drinking liquids to avoid dehydration. Try drinking an eight-ounce glass of water before and after you exercise. Be on the alert for these conditions that cause dehydration:
- High temperatures can cause you to sweat more.
- Harder workouts can cause you to sweat more.
- Body size can affect how much you sweat. Smaller bodies tend to sweat less than larger bodies.
- Long workouts can cause you to lose more body fluids.

Organic Foods

Another word that you might see when shopping for food is “organic.” Organic food is food that is produced without manufactured chemicals. There's no difference in nutritional value between foods grown with organic fertilizers and those grown with chemical fertilizers. However, some people buy organic fruits and vegetables out of concern for health and the environment.

INDIVIDUAL NUTRITIONAL NEEDS

Different people have different nutritional needs. Their needs are based on their size, activity level, age, and other factors.

Nutrition and Medical Conditions

The food people eat can be linked to some medical problems including high blood pressure, heart disease, cancer, and obesity. Both short- and long-term illnesses and medical conditions (such as diabetes) can also affect food needs. A physician or dietitian can help determine a healthful eating plan.

> You can purchase foods that have been organically grown at farmers markets and at some supermarkets. Check your local store's produce department for these products.
Nutrition for Vegetarians

What is a vegetarian? A vegetarian is generally someone who does not eat meat, poultry, or fish. Vegetarian meals are typically made up of vegetables, fruits, grains, nuts, and sometimes eggs and dairy products. If vegetarians eat a wide selection of food, they’re eating in a way that fits today’s nutritional guidelines. Vegetarian meals feature plant foods rich in fiber and complex carbohydrates. Well-planned vegetarian eating patterns are often lower in fat and cholesterol than nonvegetarian ones. It’s important to get nutritional counseling before following a strict vegetarian diet.

Nutrition for Athletes

Good nutrition is important for you to reach peak performance in any sport. Are the nutritional needs of competitive athletes any different from those of people who exercise for health and enjoyment? The answer is no. Athletes need carbohydrates, protein, fat, vitamins, minerals, and water. However, competitive athletes may need more of these nutrients.

Quenching Thirst

You sweat when you’re physically active—everyone does. Perspiration evaporates from your skin, and you need to replace the fluid you lose. Drink fluids before, during, and after activities even when you aren’t thirsty. Thirst is a sign of dehydration. But what should you drink? If you work out for 60 minutes or less, drink water. For longer, strenuous activities, you can also dilute fruit juices to half-strength.

Fuel for Your Body

Carbohydrates are the best source of energy. If you are an athlete, you should plan on getting 60 to 65 percent of your energy needs from carbohydrates. Eating foods rich in complex carbohydrates increases your athletic fitness and endurance. By using carbohydrates as your body’s main fuel, you should be able to keep up strenuous activity for a longer time.