



Socio-cultural Factors Influencing Food Consumption Patterns in the Black African Population in an Urban Township in South Africa

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ABSTRACT The present study was undertaken to examine socio-cultural factors that influence food intake in different groups of people residing in a black township in Cape Town. Focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were used to explore these factors in men, and women of different age groups. Discussions were recorded, transcribed and analysed according to emerging themes. The main findings of the study indicated that in addition to nourishing the body, food is a sign of warmth, acceptance and friendship. Meat consumption on a daily basis is associated with a high socioeconomic status, while consumption of vegetables only is associated with a low socioeconomic status. Eating large portions of food is associated with affordability. Food is used for celebrations, rituals, and for welcoming guests. Food is also used during social occasions when people get together and meet socially. Sweets, ice cream and cakes are consumed on happy occasions. Fatty meat is a sign of generosity; lean meat and black tea is often used during mourning periods. Eating behaviours are learned during socialization, and carried over from generation to generation. There are socially accepted norms and values surrounding people's understanding of what food is. This information needs to be used in a more constructive way to help people choose food wisely to prevent over nutrition and associated risks. In conclusion, this paper illustrates the impact of socio-cultural factors on eating patterns in this population and emphasizes the need to take these factors into consideration in development of interventions to promote healthy eating.

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