WHAT IS FOOD LITERACY?

Based on Health Literacy concept “...the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions” (1), Food Literacy can be considered as a set of inter-related competencies, skills and abilities regarding a functional, relational and critical level: to know, to do, to sense, to want, to be.

Food Literacy includes a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes concentrated into six domains: skills and behaviours (physical actions or abilities involving food), food/health choices (actions associated with informed choices around food use), culture (societal aspect of food), knowledge (ability to understand and seek information about food), emotions (the influence of attitudes and motivation), and food systems (the ability to understand the complexity of food system) (2).

The most cited definition (3) describes Food Literacy as “…the scaffolding that empowers individuals, households, communities or nations to protect diet quality through change and strengthen dietary resilience over time. It is composed of a collection of inter-related knowledge, skills and behaviours required to plan, manage, select, prepare and eat food to meet needs and determine intake”. These elements represent the key factors – not at all easy and simple to translate in actions in everyday life - that pragmatically influence eating habits and, consequently, health and well-being.
Food literacy refers to the ways in which people interpret and implement healthy eating:

- Adequate food literacy has been argued to contribute to the enhancement of the individual psycho-physical well-being through appropriate food choices. (4)
- Inadequate food literacy has been depicted as a causal factor of negative consumer behaviours within the food system. In particular, it has been associated with unwillingness to promote a positive change in attitudes and perceptions toward food, poor ability to deal with food-related information, confusion in selecting and consuming food (5) and food wastage.
- Food Literacy concept has also been debated as a factor to improve psycho-physical wellbeing at individual and population level

Why food literacy is important for Dietitians

- Promoting food literacy is a major imperative that every dietitian, not only in clinical but also in community and population settings, must be aware of.
- Every dietitian should be specifically trained in health and food communications skills, to improve communication with patients and to help people to implement their own food skills, abilities and knowledge.

FOOD LITERACY AND HEALTH: KEY CONCEPTS

- Food Literacy concerns “the everyday practicalities associated with navigating the food system and using it to ensure a regular food intake that is consistent with nutritional recommendations” (3)
- An indirect relationship connects Food Literacy and nutrition through three mechanisms: security, choice, and pleasure
- Food Literacy concept has also been debated as factor to improve “a positive psychological, physical, emotional, and social relationship with food at both individual and societal levels” (5)

REFERENCES


ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A special thank to Ersilia Troiano for her precious help in developing this Fact Sheet and to every member of ANDID WG Food Literacy: this is a special group composed of expert colleagues with a great passion about Food Literacy

Further reading:
Vidgen H.A.
Food Literacy. Key concept for health and education.