How Can Nutrition Education Help People to Heal in the COVID-19 Days?

The human body is a very complicated organism, and for proper functioning, it needs proper nutrients and elements, which people do not have produced in their body itself but have to consume. Healthy food gives energy, proper nutrients, and elements for development, growth, and healthy body condition, while junk and fried food, sugar, and processed food cause health problems such as heart diseases, diabetes, and obesity. Currently, with the pandemic and confinement, food problem and lack of nutrition education among the population became even more obvious. Sarah Colatruglio and Joyce Slater in their article, "Food Literacy: Bridging the Gap between Food, Nutrition, and Well-Being," address the problem of lack of nutritional literacy; by using textual evidence such as quotations, statistics, and references to sources, the authors demonstrate how people’s attitude to food and nutritional literacy have recently got changed. The article “Positive and Negative Changes in Food Habits, Physical Activity Patterns, and Weight Status during COVID-19 Confinement: Associated Factors in the Chilean Population" by Daniela Reyes-Olavarria et al. is based on a survey conducted in Chile in May and June 2020; the results of the survey illustrate how COVID-19 confinement affected people’s food habits and physical activity patterns. The both articles raise a similar problem about how the wrong diet affects people’s health and point out that people prefer fast and easy food to healthy homemade meals. The COVID-19 pandemic and confinement have affected everyone in the world and created many new problems for people, but one has stayed the same: people love to eat fast, fatty, delicious food which badly influences their health and well-being. I argue that food and nutritional education have to be more valuable for people because their quality of life, health, and well-being directly depends on what they are eating and how often they exercise.

Food culture has significantly changed during the last years: different food brands created a variety of processed and ultra-processed food that became more popular and affordable than whole foods. Furthermore, many vitamins and nutritional supplements have appeared on shelves in every grocery store. Thus, Colatruglio and Slater observe that “… as a society we have never been more food centered while at the same time we have never been so far removed from the food we eat, figuratively and literally” (37). I certainly agree with this profound statement. People have a cult of food – It became impossible to truly enjoy something if it does not include a tasty, often unhealthy food. On the other hand, in fact, with all options people have it is difficult to understand what is good for the body. Brands label their products with such signs as “sugar-free,” “low-fat,” and “low sodium” to make those products more trustworthy for customers, and the average person will trust those signs without checking if products are actually healthy, or brands just made them look healthy to make higher sales profit. Today people should carefully filter information to evaluate what is truly healthy and what is not. There are many myths about diets and weight loss in informational space, and sometimes trying to follow those rules people can make it even worth for themselves. Thus, it is crucial to understand what are food literacy, nutritional literacy, and well-being, and Colatruglio and Slater help readers to understand these terms in the article. The authors emphasize that food literacy “extends beyond nutritional recommendations…” (37) and refers to “[t]he ability to cook healthy meals from scratch, grow food, read food labels correctly, as well as knowing where one’s food comes from” (45). I mostly agree that the term food literacy involves a wider range of aspects than nutritional literacy that is more about elements, vitamins, and microelements people consume with food – healthy food should be balanced, moderated, and diverse (Dr. Zhang 13). Furthermore, Colatruglio and Slater refer to the Canadian Index of Wellbeing to define well-being as “[t]he presence of the highest possible quality of life in its full breadth of expression focused on but not necessarily exclusive to: good living standards, robust health, a sustainable environment, vital communities, an educated populace, balanced time use, high level of democratic participation, and access to and participation in leisure and culture” (50). Awareness of what food is healthy and good for the body in some ways contributes in all listed aspects especially in “robust health,” “an educated populace,” and “good living standards.”

Moreover, food and nutritional education is necessary not only to help people to choose healthy food but also to make them understand that bad diet can be life threatening. Therefore, Colatruglio and Slater point out that the increase in cases of obesity and diet-related diseases directly depends on what people eat and how their dietary habits have changed in recent decades. The authors explain that “70 % of children aged 4 to 8 and 50% of adults do not consume a minimum of five daily servings of fruit and vegetable; more than 37% of children aged 4 to 9 are not consuming enough milk products; people are consuming too much fat; nutritionally-poor, calorie dense snacks, candies and condiments…” (39). Likewise, Reyes-Olavarria et al. in their article emphasize that low water and legume consumption, daily alcohol consumption, high consumption of junk and fried food have a negative effect on body weight while active breaks are “protective factors for body weight increase” (9). These two articles were written in different years and under different circumstances, but they clearly illustrate that despite world events and crises the problem of healthy eating has been there for a long time. Additionally, it is crucial to understand that adults are responsible not only for what they eat, but what their children eat as well, and it is terrifying to observe that the statistics from Colatruglio and Slater’s article demonstrates that children suffering obesity and diet-related diseases more than earlier (38). Therefore, this fact confirms once again that food and nutritional education is important – most people are responsible both for their health and well-being and for their family health and well-being.

For most of my adult life, I try to fight my bad food habits and increase the frequency of doing sports, hence I believe that people should educate themselves about food and nutritional literacy the sooner the better. It is always hard to change habits, but even tiny steps will make the goal closer. Now my diet consists of chicken, fish, dairy products, grains, and vegetables. I try to analyze what I eat even though I love chocolate, pizza, and pasta, and sometimes I allow myself to have it. Nowadays most people have access to the Internet and social media with a huge flow of different information and those who are truly concerned about their habits and well-being will always find a way to the necessary information. Most people have everything to improve the quality of their life and well-being; the problem is to recruit their willpower and start the action. Nevertheless, some people are struggling to get any food on the table to feed their children and themselves, and the problem is that unhealthy, junk food or frozen pre-cooked food is much cheaper than healthy and fresh products: “The reliance on highly processed foods can have serious health consequences, especially for lower socio-economic groups as higher income people can afford “healthy” pre-prepared foods” (Colatruglio and Slater 40). This fact makes food and nutritional education even more valuable because it might give people with low income the crucial knowledge and the ability at least to try to choose better and still affordable food for them.

As for the pandemic, it is definitely changed everybody’s lives: some people lost the only income they had and are about to lose houses or apartments, while others managed to keep their jobs but got stuck in the houses due to self-isolation. During my research on this issue I have discussed problems the COVID-19 has brought in people’s lives with my husband, Curtis Burgess, within a personal interview. He was born in Trinidad and Tobago and grew up on the U.S. Virgin Islands; he loves traditional Trinidadian food and always chooses to eat healthily: for more than 10 years he has not been eating any red meat like beef or pork. Curtis agrees that COVID-19 affected everyone in the world and emphasizes that self-protection is very important during this time. Also, he recommends to the people who work from home and spend a lot of time sitting by the desk to stay away from junk food and do some exercises at home. Additionally, he believes that during the pandemic “the safest food is the one that you cook by yourself at home” (Community Interview); hence, my husband and I do not eat out at this time, but we still order takeout meals sometimes, and it is not possible to be 100% sure that food or package is safe and not contaminated. At this pandemic time, it is crucial for people to be aware of health benefits and harm that food can cause them.

Thus, both article and my own experience demonstrate that the population experiences lack of food and nutritional literacy; in the modern world, when most women work and do business on an equal footing with men, nutritional education and an ability to cook food at home are something that both women and men should have. Even though it is inevitable that people often do not have time to cook food at home, it is still important to understand what food is good and healthy and be able to make the right choice when ordering takeout or buying pre-cooked food. Furthermore, besides the knowledge that is transferred inside the family, school and college play a huge role in personality formation and development, hence nutrition education should be mandatory in educational facilities as well.

The COVID-19 pandemic and confinement changed people’s routines and worsened existing food related problems among the population. The analysis of two articles and my own experience illustrated in this paper have shown that food and nutritional education is always important no matter what gender, age, or social status a person is. Health is a significant component of well-being and people should not sacrifice health for the convenience that junk and pre-cooked food provides.

Works Cited

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