PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

affecting our selection of food.

VALUES:

A value is a deep personal feeling about what is important. Values are strong enough to influence behaviour and motivate action. A person’s values may reflect those of family and culture in which they were raised, or they may be a personal response to the experiences encountered throughout life.

Vegetarianism is often a reflection of value-based food selection. Food selection can be related to food origins and maintenance of health.

BELIEFS:

Beliefs about what is acceptable to eat vary throughout the world and are often related to religion and cultural heritage. A belief is an opinion or conviction which need not be based on positive scientific proof. Beliefs can be challenged and changed, unlike values that remain fixed.

Many religions have food customs and impose restrictions on what their followers eat. Buddhists, for example, are partial vegetarians. They may eat fish, eggs and dairy products but are not allowed red meat. (They believe it is wrong to kill or injure living things other than fish.) Hindus, on the other hand, are allowed to eat all forms of meat except beef, because the cow is sacred in their religion.

Many religion based food restrictions were originally imposed to protect people from diseases related to poor food safety and hygiene. For example, in the past many people were infected by diseased pork and shellfish and died, but nowadays advances in the processing of food and medicine mean that observance of such restrictions is no longer necessary.

As well as religious customs, some social groups and cultures have specific beliefs about food. Many of these beliefs cannot be substantiated and have little, if any, nutritional basis; many of the fad diets published in popular magazines targeting women are examples of this.

• In an area of mid Africa, people believe that animal milk is a repulsive body secretion similar to urine. Consequently it is not consumed, despite its nutritional value.
• Some people in remote areas of South East Asia avoid eating eggs or chicken because they are believed to destroy human fertility.
• In parts of Africa, fish are believed to be unclean or possessed by evil spirits. Eating them is thought to invite disaster.
• For Australians, the eating of dog is taboo because it is considered ‘man’s best friend’. However, in countries such as Indonesia, dog has the same status as other meat sources and is considered acceptable.

**ATTITUDES AND EXPERIENCES:**
Our attitudes or views towards food are based on one or more of the following:

*The origin of the food*: e.g. food organically grown, crocodile may not appeal because of their habitat.

*Our culture*: Snails okay in France- not as prevalent here.

*Personal History*: Avoiding a food that has made you ill in the past.

*Travel Experiences*: Eating the cuisine of the culture you are visiting and cooking in that style when you return home.

*Perceived status*: E.g. eating truffles or caviar.

*Economic depression or war*: Rationing and food shortages, eating offal as it is a cheaper meat.

**HABITS:**
Many of the food habits we make are routine, and are difficult to break. Sometimes food habits are unhealthy for example having dessert after dinner, even though you’re not hungry.

**EMOTIONS:**
Some people reject food until the time of stress is over, for others it means eating ‘comfort foods’ with a high energy value- such as chocolate. It can be because the sugar, fat and caffeine in these foods acts as a stimulant or because these foods are associated with pleasant experiences, e.g. craving foods from home, when homesick.

**SELF-CONCEPT:**
Self-concept is a word used to describe how we feel about ourselves (self-esteem). Each of us has a picture in our mind relating to:

• how we look physically — strengths and weaknesses
• how well coordinated we are
• whether or not we are smart
• whether we are lucky or unlucky
• how shy or outgoing we are
• how well we manage our money
• whether or not we have good dress sense
• how talented we are at art, music, dance
• our importance as a brother or sister, son or daughter.

Our self-concept develops during childhood but is not static, it changes. Some reasons it may change include:

• how we feel physically. For example, a dose of the flu makes us feel lethargic and miserable.
• what our friends and family say to and about us. For example, a compliment or a negative criticism can lift or crush self-esteem.
• gaining weight. Weight gain can make a person feel muscular if they have been training or unattractive if they haven’t.
• messages presented by the media. For example, idealised images for both females and males make us feel unattractive.

Media recommendations below:

AMA guidelines _ body image
4.1 While acknowledging the impact of other social pressures to conform to idealised body types, the AMA recommends that publishers, programmers and advertisers promote a more realistic range of body images and role models.
4.2 Articles should not portray the wide range of normal bodily changes as pathological or be used to advertise body image products in ways that target younger audiences, as found in child and adolescent magazines.
4.3 Direct to consumer advertising of pharmaceutical products designed to play on body image and weight concerns is an unacceptable practice.
4.4 The teaching of critical literacy and advocacy skills to children and adolescents is essential to encourage constructive analysis of media content.

a) Identify two current examples of how different media promote a certain body image, one for females and one for males.

b) Describe the body image being promoted.

c) Is the body image achievable for the average male or female? Justify your answer.