

## Diet, Health, and Settlement

This issue of *Migration Matters* explores the challenges faced by newcomers in maintaining healthy diets while adapting to Canadian food culture and dealing with challenges of accessibility and acceptability of food in Canada. A variety of healthy eating resources for newcomers to BC are provided on page 2. For more information, see AMSSA's [Healthy Eating](#) resource page.

### Introduction

Maintaining a nutritious diet is a key challenge for newcomers to Canada. Poor nutrition has a variety of health consequences, which can ultimately affect other settlement outcomes for newcomers, such as labour market integration and overall well-being.<sup>1</sup>

### Dietary acculturation

Food is a primary way that people enact and express their cultural identity. As newcomers settle in to Canada, they often alter their eating habits, not only based on availability and affordability, but also based on their understanding of themselves and their identity.<sup>2</sup>

Dietary acculturation is the process of a newcomer adapting to the diet of their new country. Research has shown that this is not a linear process, but rather newcomers incorporate some new foods and re-purpose some of their traditional foods, resulting in an “integrated” or “bi-cultural” diet.<sup>3</sup> Although most newcomers try to maintain their traditional diet, some change in eating habits is inevitable.<sup>4</sup> Many factors influence dietary acculturation, as seen in the diagram below. As a result of this complexity, each newcomer’s process is unique.<sup>5</sup>

Dietary acculturation can have positive or negative effects on overall health, depending on the specific changes made.<sup>6</sup> For example, newcomers may incorporate a broader range of fruits and vegetables than before, which may improve nutrition, but they may eat more highly processed foods which may be less nutritious than before.

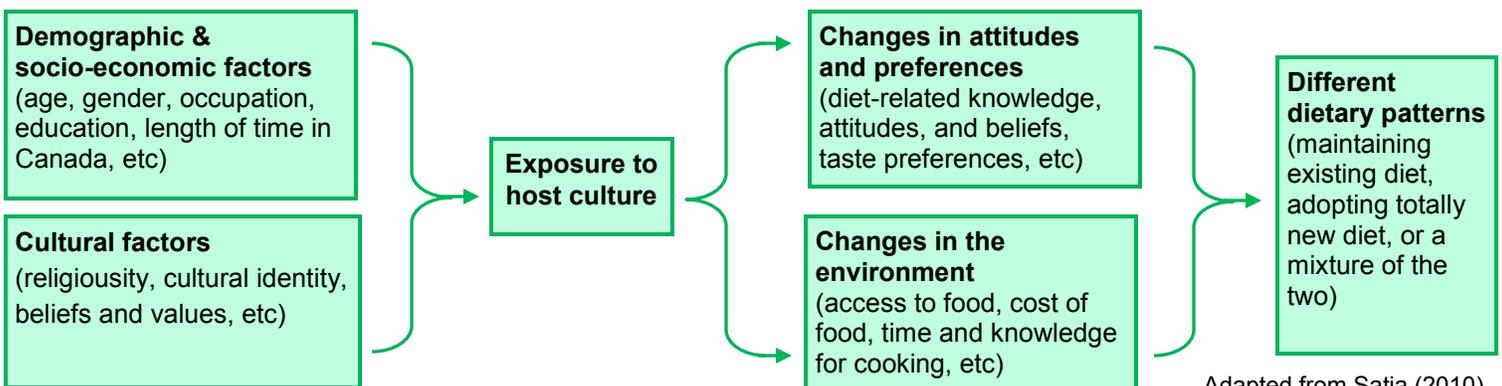
### Cultural acceptability of food

Since food is an integral part of culture, the cultural acceptability of accessible food is important for helping to foster newcomers’ sense of belonging. This is particularly important when there are religious components to a newcomer’s dietary practices. However, the cultural acceptability of food is broader than merely meeting religious requirements, incorporating the values that different cultures give to various foods.<sup>8</sup>

#### What is halal?

*Halal* is an Arabic word meaning ‘lawful’ or ‘permitted’, and is often used to refer to food which is permitted according to Muslim scripture. Certain products are prohibited entirely by Islamic law (such as pork and alcohol), while others must be made, produced, or manufactured according to Islamic law in order to be considered halal.<sup>7</sup>

### The process of dietary acculturation



Adapted from Satia (2010).

### References

- <sup>1,4</sup> Sanou, D. et al (2014). [Acculturation and Nutritional Health of Immigrants in Canada: A scoping review](#). *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health* 16:24-34.
- <sup>2</sup> Koc, M. and Welsh, J. (2001). [Food, Identity, and the Immigrant Experience](#). Ryerson University.
- <sup>3,8</sup> Soo, K. (2010). [Newcomers and Food Insecurity: A critical literature review on immigration and food security](#). Major Research Paper, Ryerson University.
- <sup>5,6</sup> Satia, J. (2010). [Dietary Acculturation and the Nutrition Transition: An overview](#). *Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism* 35(2): 219-233.
- <sup>7</sup> [What is Halal? A guide for non-Muslims](#). Islamic Council of Victoria.

## Food insecurity

Food insecurity occurs when a household has inadequate or insecure access to food because of financial constraints. Food insecurity can be marginal, when a family worries about running out of food and/or limits their food selection because of lack of money for food. It can be moderate, when families compromise in quality and/or quantity of food due to a lack of money for food. Or it can be severe, when families miss meals, reduce food intake, and at the most extreme go day(s) without food.<sup>9</sup>

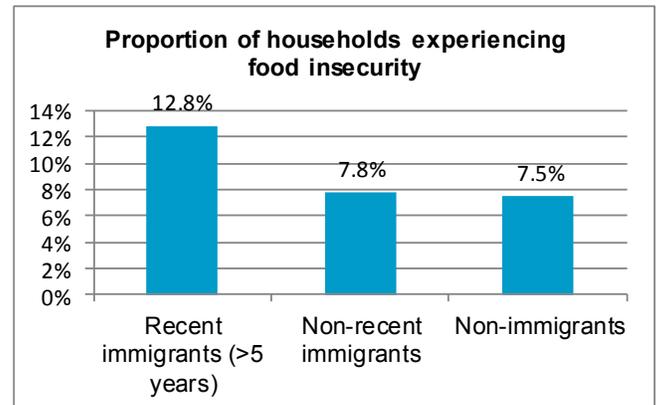
Nearly 12% of households in British Columbia experienced food insecurity in 2012. Food insecurity rates for households in BC's census metropolitan areas in 2012 were as follows:<sup>10</sup>

Kelowna	14.2%
Abbotsford	14.8%
Vancouver	10.4%
Victoria	14%
British Columbia average	11.9%

Source: Statistics Canada

Food insecurity disproportionately affects people with low incomes, which contributes to the fact that recent immigrants to Canada are much more likely to experience food insecurity than the Canadian-born and immigrants who have been in Canada longer than five years.<sup>11</sup>

Food insecurity is associated with poor self-rated health, poor mental health, and a higher incidence of chronic health conditions.<sup>12</sup>



Source: Statistics Canada

## Promoting healthy eating on a budget for newcomers in BC

As newcomers navigate changes to their diet due to dietary acculturation and food insecurity, settlement agencies can connect them with several resources and programs:

### Food preparation and cooking

Practical information on cooking can be a useful tool to support healthy eating for newcomers. Many organizations run cooking classes or cooking demonstrations. Cookbooks are another great way to support newcomer nutrition and healthy eating.

- Cookbook: [A Mosaic of Flavours](#) (MOSAIC)
- Cookbook: [All Nations, All Flavours](#) (Little Mountain Neighbourhood House)
- Recipe resource: [Cookspiration](#) (Dieticians of Canada)
- Recipe resource: [Eat Well](#) (Government of Canada)
- [Community Kitchen Resources](#) (Fresh Choice Kitchens)

### Community gardens

Community gardens can provide individuals and families with access to affordable, healthy food while also promoting a sense of community.

- Guide: [Growing gardens: A resource package on how to start your own community garden](#) (UBC)
- Map: [Community gardens in Vancouver](#) (City of Vancouver)

### Information on nutrition

A variety of resources exist to educate newcomers about nutritious eating in Canada and British Columbia.

- [Canada's Food Guide](#) (available in 12 languages)
- [Dietitian Services at HealthLinkBC](#) (interpretation services in 130 languages)
- Guide: [Food safety for fruits and vegetables](#) (available in 8 languages)
- Guide: [Store It!](#) (Interior Health)

### Healthy eating on a budget

Many programs and resources exist to support access to healthy food for newcomers and others on a low budget.

- BC Association of Farmers' Markets: [Coupon Program](#)
- Guide: [Healthy Grocery Shopping on a Budget](#) (Foodbanks Canada)
- Map: [Find a Food Bank in BC](#) (Foodbanks BC)
- [Muslim Food Bank](#)

## References

<sup>9</sup> Tarasuk, V. et al (2016). [Household Food Insecurity in Canada, 2014](#). PROOF.

<sup>10</sup> Siriam, U. et al (2015). [Changes in household food insecurity rates in Canadian metropolitan areas from 2007 to 2012](#). Canadian Journal of Public Health 106(5): e322-e327.

<sup>11</sup> Statistics Canada (2008). [Household Food Insecurity In Canada in 2007-2008: Key Statistics and Graphics](#).

<sup>12</sup> PROOF (2016). [Health, nutrition and food insecurity](#).

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