



Figure 1-6 Food choices are affected by many factors. Which have the greatest impact on your food choices?

needs (Fig. 1-6).<sup>15, 16</sup> In areas of the world where food is plentiful and fairly easy to access (e.g., the U.S., Canada, Europe, Australia, and Japan), the food selected to meet our needs is largely guided by **appetite**—the desire to eat certain foods and reject others. Appetite and food choice depend on many factors.

- **Food flavor, texture, and appearance preferences**—for many people, these are the most important factors affecting food choices. Creating more flavorful foods that are both healthy and profitable is a major focus of the food industry.
- **Culture** (knowledge, beliefs, religion, and traditions shared by a group of people) teaches individuals which foods are considered proper or appropriate to eat and which are not. For example, many people in North America believe it is proper to eat beef; however, people in some cultures never consider eating beef. Some cultures savor foods such as blood, mice, and insects—even though these foods are packed with nutrients and safe to eat, few people in North America feel they are proper to eat. Early experiences with people, places, and situations influence lifelong food choices. Many aspects of ethnic diet patterns begin when our parents introduce us to foods as children.
- **Lifestyle** includes the way we spend our resources and assign priorities. People with very busy lives often have limited time and energy to buy and prepare foods, so they opt for convenience or fast food. For some, it may be more important to spend extra time working rather than making it a priority to exercise and eat healthfully.

- **Routines and habits** related to food and eating affect what as well as when we eat. Most of us eat primarily from a core group of foods—only about 100 basic items account for 75% of a person’s total food intake.
- **Food cost** is important, but it plays only a moderate role in food choices for many of us because food is relatively inexpensive in North America. In fact, we spend only about 10% of after-tax income on food.
- **Environment** includes your surroundings and experiences. In North America, the environment is filled with opportunities to obtain affordable, delicious, high-calorie food—vending machines, bake sales, food courts in shopping areas, and candy displays in bookstores—and encourages (via marketing) the consumption of these foods. Experiences with friends, family, and others also can influence food choices.
- **Food marketing** is any type of action a company takes to create a desire in consumers to buy its food; **advertising** is one type of food marketing. The food industry in the United States spends well over \$34 billion annually on advertising. Some of this advertising is helpful, such as when it promotes the importance of calcium and fiber intake. However, the food industry more frequently advertises fast food, highly sweetened cereals, cookies, cakes, and pastries because such products generate the greatest profits.
- **Health and nutrition concerns, knowledge, and beliefs** also can affect food choices. Those most concerned about health and who have the greatest nutrition knowledge tend to be well-educated, middle-income professionals. The same people are generally health-oriented, have active lifestyles, and work hard to keep their bodies at a healthy weight.

