

# **Food Literacy: Bridging the Gap Between Food, Nutrition and Well-Being**

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## *Abstract*

Food has always been a central and critical dimension of human development. The last century saw incredible advancements in agriculture and nutrition science, while paradoxically the last few decades have witnessed a steep rise in nutrition-related health problems including obesity, cancer, heart disease and diabetes. The increase in these diseases has mirrored unprecedented changes in our diet, represented by a shift from basic food ingredients to thousands of processed convenience foods, many of which are nutrient-poor and decontextualized from a cultural perspective. The main response to these issues has been to exhort individuals to adopt exercise and “healthy eating”; however this has done little to improve the population’s health. Concern has also arisen over the negative impact of food production methods on the natural environment. It is therefore essential that food and healthy eating concepts are understood within a communal context and in ways that are sustainable for future generations. However, due to changing societal values and norms, and reduced educational and mentoring opportunities, many young Canadian adults lack the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values related to food which are necessary to live well. Current food and consumer trends predict that people will become even more disconnected from their food, furthering reliance on low nutrient/high calorie convenience foods and decreasing the need for food preparation skills. These trends provide a strong rationale for a new approach to food and eating. Recently, relationships between food, nutrition and well-being have emerged through concepts such as “food well-being”, the Slow Food Movement and re-emphasis on the importance of the family meal. Of particular interest is “food literacy” and its role in nutrition and living well. This presentation will review and explore concepts of “food literacy” as they relate to well-being, including dimensions of health, culture and sustainability.