3.6: Cultural Relevance

The integration of culture across the phases of the nursing process is crucial considering that culture is a part of each person’s life. It is a way of life and not tied just to ethnicity or nationality. In addition, food is culture and culture is food, which means that all individuals have cultural food practices.

Alongside this, Canada is a country of immigrants that has been generously hosted by the Indigenous Peoples including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. The politics of eating is influenced by the history of colonization because representation and lack of representation of Indigenous Peoples continues to inform national policies. In developing the multiple iterations of Canada’s Food Guide, there was a failure to recognize the meaning and diversity of healthy eating and food practices amongst all Canadians. Subsequently, Health Canada developed a supplementary document for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples in 2007, found at: “Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide: First Nations, Inuit and Metis.” Although Health Canada (2007) has said that this document can be used in combination with Canada’s Food Guide 2019, it has not been updated to align with the evidence and principles presented in the new edition. However, input was sought from National Indigenous Organizations when developing the new guide, which also incorporates information about the unique histories, social determinants of health, and life circumstances of Indigenous Peoples, challenges they encounter, and the benefits of traditional food.

As part of your practice, you must work closely with clients to develop an intimate understanding of their cultural eating patterns and particularly their traditional and ethnic foods. This is important considering that the image of a plate of food presented in Canada’s Food Guide 2019 mainly includes westernized foods. It does not present what might be recognized as traditional or ethnic foods, i.e., jackfruit, plantain, lamb, caribou, etc. This is problematic because clients may interpret their traditional foods as not being healthy because of lack of representation on the plate.

See Film Clip 3.2 of Yasmin Khatau speaking about her reflection of Canada’s Food Guide 2019 from a cultural perspective.
As a health professional, you can work with clients to **validate and support their traditional food choices**. You are not expected to know the health implications of all foods and food preparation across Canada. Instead, assessment becomes your tool of inquiry because it allows you to learn about the foods, food practices, and cultural meaning of food directly from the client and family. Consider the difference between learning and supporting healthy eating along the continuum as opposed to making definitive judgements about whether something is healthy or not. Furthermore, **co-developing plans of care with clients** that prioritize their cultural meaning of foods and food practices will reduce the likelihood that an unwelcome medicalized perspective will be imposed. Rather, this collaborative approach can empower the client to share their cultural food practices, integrate their health knowledge, and facilitate sustainable healthy eating that respects their agency and cultural identity.