

What factors influence our food choices?



We all know that it is important to eat healthy food—for now and for the future, to prevent the development of NCDs (non-communicable diseases) such as diabetes and heart disease. But we don't always eat healthy food all of the time. There are many complex influences on our ability to choose to eat healthy food—and not all of these variables are always within our control.

What factors impact our food choices? Alvina Pauvaale is a scientist from the Liggins Institue at the University of Auckland who looked into this complex question.

In this activity, students collect and analyse variables which might influence food choices for students in their class. Students then compare their ideas with key themes that Liggins scientist Alvina Pauvaale identified as part of her study.

Instructions for teachers

Discuss the idea that there are many complex influences on food choices and on our ability to buy, cook and eat healthy food.

Ask the students: What factors influence your food choices?

Students can work in groups —challenge the groups to brainstorm as many ideas as possible. Ask students to share one idea per group in round robin fashion until no new ideas are added. If necessary, prompt students to think about the many diverse and complex influences by asking them to consider concrete examples—what influenced their choice of breakfast/lunch/dinner yesterday? Cost, time, the food shops in the area, preferences....

Ideas might include: brands, social media, a special occasion, culture, diets, health needs, tradition, freshness, cost, coupons, popularity, advertising, religion, quality, climate, lifestyle, preferences, time for preparation, time for buying, availability, what others eat, mood, emotions, time of day, presentation, or appeal, storage, season, quantity, free-range, permission or parental control, what food is at home, convenience, age, appetite, cravings, judgements, distance, phobias, allergies, upbringing, knowledge, peer pressure, addiction....

Discuss: Analyse the results—which can be grouped or categorised? What are major themes? Which of these factors are influential at the level of the individual? Family? Society? Which of these factors are interconnected?









Learning resources

1. PowerPoint slides: A set of three simple slides introduce Liggins scientist Alvina Pauvaale. The slides come with notes to support the narrative.

Discuss: How did students' brainstorm and factor analyses match with Alvina's findings?

2. HAPPY study student learning resource and worksheet: This two-page printable worksheet resource describes and discusses Alvina's work. Questions and learning activities are designed to engage students in thinking about the study and applying findings to their own experiences.

References

Pauuvale, A. F. (2018). Health-related attitudes, perceptions and practices of young people: A comparative observational case study between a school in New Zealand and Tonga (Masters dissertation, ResearchSpace@ Auckland).

Pauuvale, A. F., Apelu, D., Pamaka, S., Ofanoa, M., Vickers, M., & Bay, J. L. (2019). *Adolescent voices matter: Exploring the nutritional views of Maori and Pacific adolescents in a low-income community in Auckland*. Poster session presented at the DOHaD World Congress 2019, Melbourne, Australia.

Image references: All images used in the resources that accompany this activity have been licensed from iStock.com or are original images owned and created by the Liggins Institute unless otherwise specified.









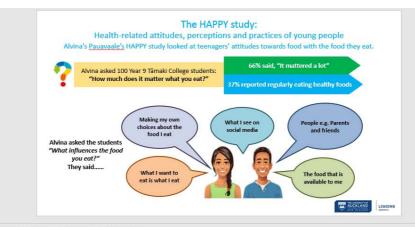
Slide One



Meet Alvina: Alvina went to Tamaki College in Glen Innes, Auckland. She enjoyed science at school and was involved in a programme developed by the Ligains Institute to encourage more Maori and Pacific students with a passion for science to pursue a career in science. Alvina completed a Bachelor of Science degree at the University of Auckland. However, she realised that science alone wasn't really her calling. Being a young female Tongan, she knew she wanted to do something that helped her Pasifika people.

Once Alvina had completed her degree, she began work as a Research Assistant on the Pacific Science for Health Literacy Project (PSHLP) at the Ligains Institute. Her passion became evident in the work she was a part of and that is why she went on to pursue a Masters degree – so that she can continue to help her people in the fight against non-communicable diseases.

Slide Two



The HAPPY study was the result of Alvina's Masters in Health Science degree at the Liaains Institute.

She is now completing a PhD building on this research.

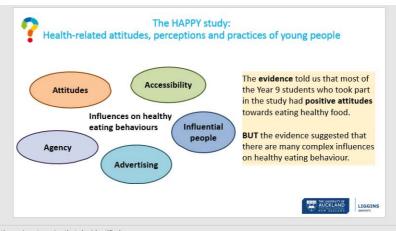
She will be working closely with adolescents to explore their views on how the food environment impacts their health. This will help to inform an intervention, led by adolescents, to improve the health of the Glen Innes community.

Alvina asked 100 students at Tamaki College – how much does it matters what you eat?

What influences the food you eat? These are some of the answers students gave. Alvina analysed her data and decided on key themes.

What key idea or theme do you think each of the above speech bubbles represents?

Slide Three



Alvina analysed her data from the 100 students – these are the main categories that she identified. How do these categories align with the 'influences on food choices' brainstormed ideas that you collected from your class?

To extend this work - collect data like Alvina did by surveying your parents/whanau and friends.









Printable worksheet - double-sided A5 folded

QUESTIONS TO THINK AND TALK ABOUT

A career in science research:

What qualifications has Alvina gained that enable her to do this work? What advice would you give to a year nine student to help them on a pathway like Alvina's? What are the findings of Alvina's Masters research?

What questions would you like to ask Alvina about her career or research?

Science knowledge:

The food stores around each school contribute to the 'built food environment' of the community.

Look up a definition for 'built food environment'

What are NCDs?

- How can you help?

Reflecting on your actions

Talk with your group about the food/drink you consumed today and yesterday If you had to give yourself a health rating from 1—really unhealthy to 5 — only healthy food/drink passed my lips — what would your rating be?

- Now discuss your rating with your group.

 We know we should be eating healthy food. What different things might stop us from eating a healthy diet or make it harder to eat healthy food?
- What do you think "eat healthy food regularly" means?

Do you think that **built food environment** might influence the **type** Year 9 students in each community are eating? *Justify your answer* ence the type of food that Use the QR code to choose from sentence starters to present your argument:



- Compare and contrast the findings for Tāmaki College and Tonga High School.

 make a list of similarities and differences in the data from each school com

suggest possible reasons for the similarities and differences
 How could you use the evidence and information from this study to:

- explore the built food environment around your school
- · explore how the built food environment might influence YOUR food choices
- improve the built food environment for students in YOUR school



What other research questions about the built food environment could be useful to explore?











We are what





We all know the importance of a healthy diet but we don't eat healthy food all of the time.



What factors influence our food choices?

A scientist from the Liggins Institute looked into this question.

Alvina Pauuvale's research looked at young peoples' food choices and the environment around them.



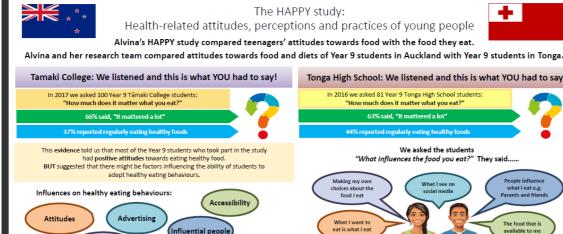
- Meet Alvina: "I went to Tamaki College in Glen Innes, Auckland. I
 enjoyed science at school and I was involved in a programme developed
 by the Liggins Institute to encourage more Maori and Pacific students
 with a passion for science to pursue a career in science.
- I completed a Bachelor of Science degree at the University of Auckland. However, I realised that science alone wasn't really my calling. Being a young female Tongan, I knew I wanted to do something that helped my Pasifika people.
- Once I had completed my degree I began work as a Research Assistant on the Pacific Science for Health Literacy Project (PSHLP) at the Liggins Institute. My passion became evident in the work I was a part of and that is why I went on to pursue my Masters degree so that I can continue to help my people in the fight against non-communicable diseases.
- The HAPPY study was the result of my Masters in Health Science degree at the Liggins Institute
- I am now completing a PhD, building on this research. I will be working closely with adolescents from the Glen Innes community to explore their views on how the food environment impacts their health.

Find out more about Alvina and her career journey here:



Find out more about Alvina's study





Choices Alvina and her research team MAPPED the food stores surrounding Tāmaki College

O very Unhealthy O Unhealthy O OK O Health

"How much does it matter what you eat? We asked the students

Tonga High School: We listened and this is what YOU had to say!

In 2016 we asked 81 Year 9 Tonga High School students:

"What influences the food you eat?" They said



Alvina and her research team MAPPED the food stores surrounding Tonga High School







O very Unhealthy O Unhealthy O OK O Health

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