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Physical, psychological, cultural and social factors in influencing food choices of northern chinese patients with coronary heart disease

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Food choices directly reflect dietary practice and substantially contribute to individuals' cardiovascular health. In China, coronary heart disease (CHD) and cardiometabolic risk factors are more prevalent among northern Chinese, who prefer a high intake of salt and fat. However, little was known about how the food choices were shaped among this population. This study aims to explore the factors influencing the food choices among northern Chinese CHD patients. Qualitative design of semi-structured individual interviews was adopted. Patients hospitalized with acute coronary syndrome- the cause of commonest CHD hospital admissions were recruited for the one-to-one interviews in three general hospitals in north China. Participants' food choices for meals, snacks and drinks and the reasons they choose these particular foods were interviewed. 34 participants (M=18, F=16, mean age 61.8 ± 10.3 years) were recruited noted by data saturation. Under content analysis, four themes emerged with physical factors (e.g., taste preference, resources, physical limitations, health and nutrition concerns), psychological factors (childhood experience and family practice), cultural factors (traditional cooking methods, foods' cultural symbolism, people's cultural roles, seasonal changes and celebrations) and social factors (economic status and social status). In combination with the physical and psychological factors, the cultural and social factors help to explain the food choices of this high-risk cohort. For example, fat was once a scarce food during the great famine, therefore high-fat foods used to represent a good quality of life. Being financially capable nowadays, Chinese tend to consume more high-fat foods, leading to higher CHD risk.

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