

Assessing food and nutrition literacy in children and adolescents: A systematic review of existing tools

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Introduction: Food literacy (FL) and nutrition literacy (NL) are emerging concepts that may be important in navigating our current food environment. Building these skills and abilities at a young age is important for skill retention, confidence in food practices and supporting lifelong healthy eating habits. Identifying valid and reliable tools to assess FL or NL among children and/or adolescents can support research among these populations.

Objectives: The aim of this review was to i) identify existing tools that measure FL and NL among children and/or adolescents, and ii) describe the validity and reliability of these tools.

Methods: A four-phase protocol was used to systematically retrieve articles from 6 databases, by two authors, independently.

Results: Twelve tools were identified. Three tools measured FL, one tool measured NL, four tools measured both FL and NL, and four tools measured sub-areas of NL – more specifically, critical nutrition literacy, menu board literacy and food label literacy. Most tools were self-reported, developed based on a theoretical framework, and were found to be valid and reliable for a specific age- and ethnic- group. The majority of tools targeted older children and adolescents (9-17yr old), and one tool targeted preschoolers (3-5yr old). No tools have been developed for children and adolescents in Canada.

Conclusions: Most widely used definitions of FL and NL do not acknowledge life-stage specific criterion. Continued efforts are needed to develop a comprehensive definition and framework of FL and NL appropriate for both children and adolescents. These efforts will help facilitate and inform assessment tools in the future.

Significance: Given that FL and NL may be heavily influenced by food environment, the results of this review can help inform the development of tools to assess FL and NL among Canadian children and adolescents by researchers and practitioners.

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