



## Food Coaching: A New Methodology for an Old Problem

Valentini Konstantinidou, MSc, PhD\*

Nutritional Genomics Specialist and Accredited Practitioner Coach (IIC&M), Spain

### Introduction

In the present short communication, the author presented and introduced the food coaching. Food coaching practice is a methodology with great potential to enhance and favorite the adherence to a healthy dietary pattern for the prevention of multifactorial diseases and the promotion of well-being.

Dietary patterns are a major environmental factor that people are exposed to numerous times a day throughout their lives. Diet is also an environmental factor that people can learn to control from early on to prevent diet-related diseases and conditions and promote healthy living and aging. Data from big, randomized, and controlled intervention trials (RCTs) have shown that adherence to dietary patterns could provide an excellent primary form of prevention from cardiovascular diseases [1]. A healthy dietary pattern, such as the Mediterranean diet or the DASH diet [2] is characterized by whole foods that are rich in vitamins, minerals, and phytochemicals. The adherence to these dietary patterns has been inversely associated with high blood pressure and hypercholesterolemia, among other cardiovascular risk factors. Continuous follow-up by trained professionals is crucial to empower people achieve the necessary adherence level and benefits from the above-mentioned effects.

Adherence to healthy dietary patterns and lifestyles are still a struggle for healthcare practitioners around the world, even with the advanced scientific guidelines in the field. Health professionals tend to notice that the lack of adherence could be the primary cause of illness in the case of chronic diseases [3]. Although natural, sustainable, whole food consumption is becoming the focus of preventive medicine and a fundamental way of treatment in numerous conditions and diseases, people do not always know how to find and choose their food. In the information era where technological applications lead the health and well-being of the population, people are often confused and misled about the correct quality and quantity when it comes to the consumption of whole foods. Thus, they prefer to follow quick fix and easy methods they can find, mainly online, from unreliable sources. The majority of these methods lack precise scientific basis and education on food selection. Quality food allows the body to heal, repair, and become rebalanced at the molecular and genetic level [4] but this knowledge does not always reach the final consumer.

### Definition

Food coaching, as a sub-category of health coaching, focuses on how to unlock an individual's potential to perform healthy food choices in every stage of their life and mobilize them to move forward. Food coaching is a practice that promotes an interdisciplinary, science-based methodology for a fundamental purpose: food selection and suitable food consumption for the prevention of diet-related diseases and the promotion of health and well-being. Food coaching lies above health coaching and common dietary recommendations. It aims to help people acquire advanced knowledge about how food can affect their health and empowers them to perform, related-to-food, lifestyle changes that will reveal their optimal self.

A Food-focused coaching practice is a special category in the field of coaching that targets long-term goals of well-being and health. Although in its infancy, it has begun to attract interest from the general public. Food coaching practice focuses on food preferences, food selection, food preparation, and storage. As well as focusing on foods that is local, fresh, and sustainable for consumption. Food coaching aims to assist health professionals who struggle with patient adherence to dietary recommendations and a healthy lifestyle.

### Where Does it Come From?

Coaching, in general, establishes a relational synergy in an atmosphere of trust creating a unique and special coach-coachee relationship with the total focus on the coachee. Coachee is the term used

### OPEN ACCESS

#### \*Correspondence:

Valentini Konstantinidou, MEDOLIALI  
SL, Calle Almogavers, 165, 08018,  
Barcelona, Spain, Tel: +34 93 401 98  
55;

E-mail: [valentini@dnanutricoach.com](mailto:valentini@dnanutricoach.com)

Received Date: 19 Apr 2017

Accepted Date: 29 Jun 2017

Published Date: 06 Jul 2017

#### Citation:

Konstantinidou V. Food Coaching: A  
New Methodology for an Old Problem.  
*Ann Nutr Food Sci.* 2017; 1(1): 1003.

Copyright © 2017 Konstantinidou  
V. This is an open access article  
distributed under the Creative  
Commons Attribution License, which  
permits unrestricted use, distribution,  
and reproduction in any medium,  
provided the original work is properly  
cited.

for the person who receives the coaching from the coach. Goal setting is pivotal in the coaching practice. People seek coaching because they want to move forward with the goals they work towards every day. A goal is not just a target to aim for. It is a desired outcome, a positive intent that will enhance their life in some way.

Coaching has fundamental differences from therapy because it takes the coachee from a place of function to a place of an enhanced function. Coaching encourages and requests proactive behavior without allowing large amounts of time for negative reflection. Both coaching and therapy, however, use powerful listening skills to attend to their client's needs.

Food coaching belongs to the greater field of life coaching, which encompasses health coaching. Life coaching has already made its way into clinical practice and the new field of research termed "Health Coaching" has emerged. Health coaching offers a great challenge and opportunity to bring life and social sciences closer for the promotion or treatment of health in clinical or community settings [5]. So far the results of the first studies performed show improvement in glycemic control and a decrease in diabetes distress in patients who have followed diabetes health coaching programs [6]. Moreover, a population-based telephonic wellness coaching program has showed a positive impact on BMI reduction and on weight loss, both statistically and clinically significant, in 954 participants of a cohort of Kaiser Permanente Northern California [7]. Another recent study has shown that health coaching improved the quality of life (QoL) of type 2 diabetes mellitus and coronary artery disease patients with moderate costs [8].

Health coaching is a new approach of partnering with coachees (healthy or ill) to enhance self-management strategies and to prevent exacerbations of multifactorial diseases by supporting lifestyle changes. Researchers have already studied, in depth, the applications of health coaching in the frame of observational or clinical studies. Quantifiable measurements of improvement and the benefits that health coaching can have when accompanying traditional medical treatment for complex diseases is already the working hypothesis in ongoing studies.

## Objectives

Food coaching aims at training people to apply in their everyday life scientific and evidence-based knowledge about food benefits on their health. People who seek food coaching want to re-organize and re-think what food could be and how they can benefit from whole food consumption. The practice of food coaching aims to facilitate knowledge, enhance behavioral change towards food choices, and eliminate any frustrations people may have on food consumption. Food coaches provide a level of support and work with the coachee to take it one-step at a time to achieve their goal. Food coaching sessions are mainly once a week but could also be once every two weeks depending on the coachee. However, there has not been an established frequency of food coaching sessions, yet, that could guarantee results and benefits.

Food coaching methodology also works with values. Values govern people's response to external stimulus and this is also true for health, food choices, and food behavior. A food coach respects and prioritizes the values of the coachee when it comes to food choices.

Nowadays, people are seeking for a more balanced option and a re-definition of what quality of life means. Values control our primary

principles and serve as a strong motive for people to accomplish tasks or challenge situations. Our values influence our motivation. In food coaching it is pivotal to understand and control the facts behind the food behavior and to relate it to motivation. Intrinsic motivation is achieved when the goal is linked to personal values and a deeper will and need for achievement. Thus, the coaching-goal appears as the internal representation of a desirable improvement that will influence the current situation and start the process of change [9].

Food coaching aims to increase the coachee's awareness and patient activation level, which will lead to higher rates of adherence and treatment success. The perceived autonomy in the process of adopting new eating behaviors is crucial for effective health management and disease prevention. Polak et al. [10] claimed that lifestyle coaching is a key element in achieving the necessary improvements in combined lifestyle interventions.

The food coaching practice works as a solution-focused framework. The coachee reflects on his/her own patterns of food behavior and perception, identifies the patterns that results in unhealthy habits, and develops new ones. The coachee identifies the obstacles and develops positive cognitions about his/her self. Coaching practice is always action-oriented and this is also true for food coaching. Action becomes a crucial part of change. A food coach uses models such as PRACTICE, GROW, and the recognition of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT Analysis) [11] that help towards the designation of a certain action plan for each case.

Food coaching has recently been applied in an intervention with children who responded positively to the motivational interviewing of the program. Authors reported that if parents are also involved in the training, this may remove roadblocks to healthy lifestyle changes for children during non-school hours and when packing lunches [12].

The lifestyle change becomes an inside-out process and attention is paid in the notion that our current eating habits are neither necessarily the best nor permanent. Coaching remains a dynamic, solution-focused, outcome-oriented, and evidence-based practice [11] aiming, now, to achieve a fine-tuned balance between our food choices and desires and our current well-being. The goal of food coaching is to trigger, personalize, and facilitate the process of food choices and consumption change.

## Benefits

Food coaching can complement other health practices to increase patient engagement, adherence, and motivation to follow their dietary guidelines and to adopt a healthier lifestyle. Food coaching could be of particular benefit to individuals with high stress and anxiety levels that affect their health. The US Department of Labor estimated that stress and poor health accounted for a cost of \$7,500 per employee per year and over \$300 billion annually in the US economy. The UK Government estimates that lost production due to stress and health issues is now over 10% of the national GDP. Food coaching could help these individuals prioritize actions, simplify their food knowledge, and start building long-term healthy eating habits based on whole food consumption. By feeding themselves correctly, they can start controlling and normalizing their inner levels of stress, even without changing the exogenous influencing factors.

Our correct, personalized food choices promoted by food coaching practices could also benefit people who suffer from digestion problems, allergies, and an unbalanced immune system. When it

comes to nutrition, variety and synergy are the most important factors. The food we eat can favor bacterial strains, absorption of vitamins and minerals, and promote a healthy gastrointestinal barrier among others benefits. Polak et al. [10] concluded that coaching has the potential to help people with diabetes improve their practical culinary skills by having credentialed chefs trained as health coaches to improve food choices and lifestyles. More studies and reports are necessary for an evidence-based approach on food coaching benefits in the short and long-term.

## Skills of a Food Coach

Food coaching, similar to health coaching, is a new and expanding profession that has not been regulated properly just yet. As it happens, with every novelty and innovation there are many seeking to take advantage of the opportunities available. There are many who will try to help interested people comprehend the benefits and limits of food consumption while they, themselves, have not been formally taught or trained to do so.

A food coach must primarily hold a university degree in food science and technology, nutrition and dietetics, agriculture, or other recognized degree with proof of knowledge of food chemistry, biology, technology, science, and health. Moreover, as happens with all coaches, a food coach should be an accredited coach by international, recognized bodies such as the International Coaching Federation (ICF), founded in 1995, or the International Regulator of Coaching and Mentoring (IIC&M) [13,14]. Proper education of coaching, establishes criteria and professional competencies beyond being a good motivational speaker or a good communicator. A coach is trained to use skills that elicit answers from the coachee. The accredited coaching courses include practical trainings, more than 50 h of real coaching practice and mentor coaching sessions. These programs usually have a minimum duration of 6 months. These courses also offer the theoretical base of coaching and educate future coaches to the utmost importance of complying with the code of ethics in any coaching practice.

## Current Limitations

The personalization of the coaching procedure, based on food choices, is a promising field that could add extra value to the efforts of adherence to treatment and to healthy lifestyle choices. However, there are current limitations in the practice of food coaching. As it happens to every new field, the concrete protocol of attendance and the methodology should be set and homogenized among coaches. Food coaches should decide on which coaching tools are the most beneficial for food coaching and establish the accurate methodology. More communications and studies using food coaching approaches are necessary to set the standards for evidence-based food coaching practice.

## Conclusion

Although coaching lacks conceptual clarity and a concrete design, it has already found its way into healthcare. The integration of food sciences and coaching can add extra value to existing health coaching

practices. Food coaching requires a multidisciplinary experience. A food coach should have profound knowledge of the subject beyond applying evidence-based communication. The personalization of the coaching procedure, based on food choices, is a promising field that could add extra value to efforts of adherence to treatment and to healthy lifestyle choices. Most importantly, food coaching has the potential to motivate and support people to make changes and adhere to the recommended lifestyle choices. Current scientific results are grounded on a short follow-up period, and more evidence is needed to evaluate the long-term outcomes of health coaching and food coaching programs in particular.

## References

1. Estruch R, Ros E, Salas-Salvadó J, Covas MI, Corella D, Arós F, et al. Primary prevention of cardiovascular disease with a Mediterranean diet. *N Engl J Med.* 2013;368(14):1279-90.
2. Harnden KE, Frayn KN, Hodson L. Dietary approaches to stop hypertension (DASH) diet: applicability and acceptability to a UK population. *J Hum Nutr Diet.* 2010;23(1):3-10.
3. Fuster V. A first dilemma in cardiovascular medicine. Adherence versus personalized therapy. *JACC.* 2014;64.
4. Fitó M, Konstantinidou V. Nutritional genomics and the mediterranean diet's effects on human cardiovascular health. *Nutrients.* 2016;8(4):218.
5. Wagner KA, Braun E, Armah SM, Horan D, Smith LG, Pike J, et al. Dietary intervention for glucose tolerance in teens (DIG IT): Protocol of a randomized controlled trial using health coaching to prevent youth-onset type 2 diabetes. *Contemp Clin Trials.* 2017;53:171-7.
6. Delaney G, Newlyn N, Pamplona E, Hocking SL. Identification of patients with diabetes who benefit most from a health coaching program in chronic disease management, Sydney, Australia, 2013. *Prev Chronic Dis.* 2017;14:E21.
7. Schmittiel JA, Adams SR, Goler N, Sanna RS, Boccio M, Bellamy DJ, et al. The impact of telephonic wellness coaching on weight loss: A "Natural Experiments for Translation in Diabetes (NEXT-D)" study. *Obesity (Silver Spring).* 2017;25(2):352-6.
8. Oksman E, Linna M, Hörhammer I, Lammintakanen J, Talja M. Cost-effectiveness analysis for a tele-based health coaching program for chronic disease in primary care. *BMC Health Serv Res.* 2017;17(1):138.
9. Grant AM. An integrated model of goal-focused coaching: An evidence-based framework for teaching and practice. *Int Coach Psychol Rev.* 2012;7(2):146-65.
10. Polak R, Dill D, Abrahamson MJ, Pojednic RM, Phillips EM. Innovation in diabetes care: improving consumption of healthy food through a "chef coaching" program: a case report. *Glob Adv Health Med.* 2014;3(6):42-8.
11. Grant A, Stober D. *Evidence based Coaching Handbook.* New Jersey: Wiley, USA; 2006.
12. Ige TJ, DeLeon P, Nabors L. Motivational interviewing in an obesity prevention program for children. *Health Promot Pract.* 2017;18(2):263-274.
13. <https://www.coachfederation.org/>
14. <http://www.iicandm.org/>