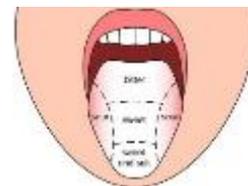


Discuss evolutionary explanations of food preference (8 and 16 marks)



Natural Selection favoured the adaptations, including food preferences, that enabled survival.

Human's evolved in an environment where food supplies were not constant and therefore sweet, fatty or salty foods would have been valued as they are vital requirements for the body.

Early ancestors would have developed a preference for meat as meat would have been around all year long and was a rich source of protein which was needed to provide a catalyst for the growth of the brain as skills developed and became more intricate.

There was also a preference for fatty foods as it provided valuable energy, especially when eating the next meal was always uncertain.

Other adaptive food preferences included sweet and umami tastes which indicate carbohydrates and protein that are basic to survival. Salt would also have been favourable as it's critical to the functioning of cells.

Lastly we have developed a sensitivity to sour and bitter tastes as they can indicate toxins and again help our survival.

It would also have been adaptive to develop taste aversion learning so that if we are sick with a certain food, our food preferences would change to avoid that food and enable survival.

In support for the preference of sweet foods, Steiner found that children preferred sweet foods to bitter ones and this suggests an innate preference. This can provide substantial support as using children rules out extraneous variables such as environmental and social learning factors as children are too young to have learnt preferences.

Support for the evolutionary explanation has also come from comparative studies as Stanford found that chimpanzee's, when coming close to starvation, would kill and eat the fattiest parts rather than the more nutritious flesh, highlighting how our own behaviour may have been shaped by the conditions in the EEA.

As for taste aversion, Morning sickness in pregnant women can provide strong evidence. This is because it is found in 75% of women and it may be because the body is trying to get rid of anything that may harm the embryo (the embryo protection hypothesis). It can also be the reason why many women develop an aversion to certain foods during pregnancy as it would have been adaptive for survival in the EEA.

Taste aversion research also has multiple real-life practical applications. For example, it can be used to encourage farmers to use stronger poisons that don't allow pests to try a little and survive and so it will help them to remove pests from their crops.

It also can be applied readily to humans. Bernstein found that when giving a novel ice cream to cancer patients before their chemotherapy (that induced nausea), they actually developed an aversion to that flavour of ice cream.

However, a downfall is that evolutionary explanations are not scientific and are based on speculations about the EEA. Perhaps the environment was different or our preferences for salty or sugary foods nowadays could be due to advertising, availability and convenience and not due to adaptive responses in the EEA.

The explanation is also reductionist. It does not take into account other factors or appreciate cultural transmission of eating behaviour such as the broad ranges of food likes and dislikes that there is between cultures today; if it was an evolved response than we would all have the same preferences.

Furthermore is the idea of determinism. The theory sees preferences as dictated by biology which is shaped through genes and so it does not allow for free will when, for example, people do exercise their free will and enjoy bitter foods or foods that are actually poisonous (e.g. alcohol) and this is clearly overriding genetic predispositions.

Additionally, some preferences are clearly a modern adaption (such as low cholesterol foods) as these preferences would have hindered our ancestor's survival and so ultimately it cannot be concluded that our food preferences nowadays were shaped through evolution alone.