

Dietary advice in the Indian context- A critical Assessment

Manjiri Mudgalkar*

Department of clinical Nutrition and Dietetics, Prathima Institute of Medical Sciences, Karimnagar, India

*Corresponding Author:

Manjiri Mudgalkar, Department of clinical Nutrition and Dietetics, Prathima Institute of Medical Sciences, Karimnagar, India

E-MAIL: dr.maanjiri@yahoo.co.in

Date of Submission: 23/01/2022

Date of Review: 25/02/2022

Date of Acceptance: 30/03/2022

The most important contributory variables for human resource development in the country are health and nutrition. In India, approximately 28% of the rural population and 26% of the urban population are believed to be poor, which is defined as the spending required to obtain, on average, 2400 Kcal per capita per day in rural regions and 2100 Kcal in urban areas.^[1] Long-term malnutrition causes stunting and wasting, as well as non-communicable chronic diet-related illnesses, increased morbidity and mortality, and a reduction in physical output.

To attain dietary goals, proper nutritional behavior and food choices are required. Nutrients obtained from diet have an important role in physical growth and development, appropriate bodily function, physical activity, and overall health. Essential nutrient requirements differ depending on age, gender, physiological status, and physical activity. Dietary intakes that are either below or above the body's requirements can result in undernutrition (deficiency disorders) or overnutrition (affluent diseases). The nutrients must be obtained by a careful selection and mix of foods from various food groups.^[2]

Indian diets were found to be unhealthy in all states and income categories. In addition, Indians consume too many cereals and too few proteins, fruits, and vegetables. Importantly, unlike many other countries, India does not have a problem with excessive animal protein consumption.

A well-balanced diet includes all of the essential elements in the right amounts and proportions. It's simple to create by combining the four fundamental dietary groups. Around 50-60% of total calories should come from carbs, preferably complex carbohydrates, 10-15% from proteins, and 20-30% from both visible and invisible fat in a well-balanced diet. A well-balanced diet should also include non-nutrients including dietary fibre, antioxidants, and phytochemicals, all of which have health advantages. Vitamins C and E, beta-carotene, riboflavin, and selenium are antioxidants that protect the human body from free radical damage. Other phytochemicals, such as polyphenols and flavones, provide antioxidant protection as well. Because of changes in lifestyle, there is a higher demand for processed, ready-to-eat, and convenience foods. As more women work

outside the home and families have become more nuclear, processed food consumption will rise, particularly in urban regions. Consumers today are looking for quick-to-cook, ready-to-eat foods that take less time to prepare than typical home-cooked meals.

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Consuming unhealthy processed foods on a regular basis increases calorie intake while offering no nutrients, vitamins, or minerals. Processed foods contain food additives in addition to being nonnutritive. Excessive consumption of food additives may have negative health consequences. These restrictions are reviewed by national food regulatory agencies on a regular basis. As a result, eating processed foods may not only decrease nutrient intake, but also raise the chance of being exposed to numerous chemical additives. With more time constraints at home in the next years, demand for processed meals is sure to rise. As a result, it is critical to ensure that a nutritionally balanced diet is not jeopardised by indiscriminate consumption of various processed and convenience foods.^[3]

To summarize, we should favor traditional home-cooked meals, avoid snacking in place of meals, and restrict our intake of sweets and unhealthy processed foods. Dietary habits are critical for living a long and disease-free life.

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How to cite this article: Mudgalkar M. Dietary advice in the Indian context- A critical Assessment. Perspectives in Medical Research. 2022;10(1):103-104
DOI: [10.47799/pimr.1001.20](https://doi.org/10.47799/pimr.1001.20)