

Healthy Eating: Challenges of Preset Era

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Abstract

Over the past 75 years, India has undergone a sweeping transformation, marked by the forces of globalization and urbanization that have significantly influenced dietary patterns. This shift has given rise to the widespread adoption of sophisticated and high-calorie fast foods, colloquially known as junk foods, altering the traditional dietary landscape in the country. While these fast-food choices have gained substantial acceptance among the Indian populace, their consumption has been accompanied by detrimental health effects, contributing to the rise of issues such as obesity, coronary artery disease, and diabetes mellitus.

This article delves into the repercussions of the shift from wholesome, traditional diets to the prevalent inclination towards junk food consumption and its impact on overall health. Robust scientific evidence substantiates the claim that fast food has become an integral part of people's diets, gradually displacing healthier traditional alternatives. To counter the escalating prevalence of diet and lifestyle-related ailments, a continual emphasis on educating children and teenagers about the hazards associated with junk food consumption is imperative.

The health risks inherent in fast food consumption cannot be ignored, necessitating comprehensive education initiatives. Addressing this global challenge demands a focused approach to nutrition and wellness education, with the potential to significantly alter habits, reduce the consumption of junk food, and promote healthier dietary choices for a more fulfilling and healthier life.

Keywords: Fast food, Diet, Globalization, Diseases, Nutrition, Health

INTRODUCTION

Food is not just used to sate hunger in India; it also plays a significant role in ceremonies, traditions, and the reunification of the family. When our forefathers lived, Indian people had traditional and authentic eating habits, however with time, this has changed: the people have shifted from plantain leaf to ceramic. Although eating habits often vary by culture, there have been significant changes over the past few decades. This can be attributed to the nation's rapidly expanding economy, the transition from antiquated to modern technologies, globalisation, industrialization, constant travel across borders, changing consumer preferences, and a surge in the desire for "fast" and processed foods. According to projections, between 2010 and 2040, the prevalence of overweight and obesity among Indians aged 20 to 69 will more than double and triple, respectively (**Luhar et al., 2020**). Non-communicable diseases are becoming more common around the world as a result of inadequate nutrition and unhealthy lifestyle choices (**WHO, 2003**).

AIM

Examining the intricacies of 21st-century food challenges requires a closer look at the hurdles hindering the widespread adoption of healthy eating practices.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study drew upon primary sources sourced from relevant research papers and review articles, carefully chosen for their alignment with the research objectives. Comprehensive insights were also gathered from scrutinizing reports from the World Health Organization (WHO) and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare reports.

EATING HABITS

Indian culinary traditions, deeply rooted in a rich historical narrative, intricately influence dietary habits across the nation's families. These habits adapt to the diverse schedules and preferences of each family member. Traditionally, meal preparation primarily fell upon women, but the contemporary era has witnessed the substantial integration of fast food into dietary choices. Despite a growing awareness of the potential long-term health risks associated with fast food, a comprehensive embrace of healthier alternatives is still in its formative stages.

As per the National Institute of Nutrition (NIN), "unhealthy (junk) foods" are defined as those with minimal proteins, vitamins, or minerals but are rich in salt, sugar, fats, and high in energy (calories).

Globally recognized as junk food, these items lack nutritional value while being loaded with fat, salt, and sugar. "Foods that have little to no nutritional value but are high in fat, salt, and sugar are commonly referred to as junk food around the world (Keshari P et al., 2016).

The evolution of Indian eating habits reflects a dynamic interplay between traditional culinary practices and the contemporary influence of fast food. Despite an increasing awareness of health risks associated with certain dietary choices, a discernible shift in attitudes towards embracing healthier options is underway, marking a nuanced transformation in the culinary landscape. This ongoing transition emphasizes the need for a holistic approach to dietary choices and nutritional education for a healthier and more sustainable lifestyle.

The Changing Indian Diet

Eating patterns in India have undergone significant changes in recent decades due to various factors, including urbanization, globalization, economic growth, and lifestyle shifts. There are some of the notable changes in eating habits in India such as

- **Increased Consumption of Processed and Fast Foods:**

Urbanization has led to a rise in the consumption of processed and fast foods, including burgers, pizzas, fried snacks, and packaged convenience foods.

The convenience and affordability of these foods have made them popular choices, particularly among urban populations.

- **Greater Consumption of Non-Traditional Cuisines:**

Indians are increasingly exploring non-traditional cuisines such as Chinese, Italian, Mexican, and continental dishes.

The availability of international restaurant chains and the fusion of global flavors with Indian ingredients have contributed to this trend.

- **Growing Preference for Dining Out:**

With busier lifestyles and increased disposable income, more people in urban areas are dining out at restaurants and cafes.

Eating out has become a social activity and a way to experience diverse culinary offerings.

- **Snacking Culture:**

Snacking between meals has become more common. Snack foods like chips, cookies, and instant noodles are readily available and widely consumed.

Street food vendors offer a variety of snacks that cater to different tastes and preferences.

- **Prevalence of Ready-to-Eat Meals and Snacks:**

The availability of ready-to-eat meals and snacks has surged, catering to busy lifestyles. These options are often marketed as convenient and time-saving.

- **Influence of Social Media and Food Blogging:**

Social media platforms and food bloggers play a significant role in influencing eating habits by showcasing trending foods, recipes, and dining experiences. Food photography and sharing have become a cultural phenomenon. Nowadays youth are more focused on sharing what are they eating but not concerned on the nutrients they are consuming.

- **Traditional Eating Practices Still Prevail:**

Despite these changes, traditional Indian eating practices, such as family meals, home-cooked food, and adherence to cultural and religious dietary guidelines, continue to be significant in many households.

In summary, changing eating habits in India reflect a dynamic blend of traditional practices and modern influences. Urbanization, globalization, and a growing awareness of health and wellness are driving shifts in dietary preferences and consumption patterns. Balancing the preservation of cultural traditions with evolving dietary choices is a complex challenge for individuals and policymakers in India.

The fast food sector is currently expanding in India and adapting to the country's dietary needs. Youth and younger generations in India are leading the way in accepting it as normal and making it part of life. Considering the customs and evolving tastes of Indians when it comes to eating out and selecting fast food restaurants. Given how significantly food habits and diet have changed over the past ten years, one is left to question what changes will take place in the next ten years and how India will be eating in 2030.

Millennials generation are between the ages of 18 and 35 make up 65% of India's population the culture of eating out has undergone a significant transformation, in large part due to their shifting eating habits. In recent years, To accommodate the shifting nutritional choices of the Millennial generation, more fine dining facilities, cafes, lounges, bars, clubs, and international fast food restaurants have popped up in India (Singh. Gagandeep, 2017). The health risks associated with fast food are discussed in "Fast Foods and their Impact on Health". Too much sugar can lead to type 2 diabetes mellitus and dental problems. Lack of energy is a short-term negative effect of consuming junk food, which happens when junk food lacks critical nutrients even if it can be more than sufficient, causing one to feel weak. In both industrialized and developing countries, it is a vital part of daily life, and it is also accompanied by a significant increase in obesity and the health problems it causes. It's critical to consume these unhealthy foods in moderation, occasionally, and preferably in modest portions (Ashakiran and Deepthi, 2012). Even though regular

consumption of junk food has been linked to obesity and long-term health issues including high blood pressure, many people still favor it over wholesome, nutrient-dense whole meals (**Lama, 2019**). Due to globalization, junk food has undoubtedly divided the Third World. Both in the developed and developing worlds, it is an essential component of daily life, and it is accompanied by a sharp rise in obesity and its related conditions. Moderation, occasional consumption, and preferably modest portions are the keys to eating these processed foods. The battle between unhealthy meals and junk food can still be won (**McNamara, J. R., & Green, J. P. 1991**).

Fast food is delicious, but it also causes a number of health problems for everyone who eats it. People's access to a balanced and healthy diet has been impacted by these multibillion dollar companies. Fast food and junk food ingredients are known to have a variety of negative effects on health. The majority of fast food is loaded with saturated fats, trans fats, simple carbohydrates, and sodium, all of which are nutrients connected to type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular diseases (**Keshari, P., & Mishra, C. P. 2016**). According to the study, eating fast food frequently leads to consuming more calories, which increases the chance of being overweight or obese (**French, S. A., et.al (2000), French, S. A., et.al (2001), Paeratakul, S., et.al. (2003)**).

Riddled with challenges

Shifting the Indian diet to include more Western-style foods presents several challenges, as it involves a transition from traditional dietary patterns to a different set of eating habits. Health Concerns:

Western diets (Junk food) are often associated with higher consumption of processed foods, added sugars, unhealthy fats, and lower intake of fruits and vegetables. This shift can raise concerns about the potential health risks, such as increased rates of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.

Loss of Nutritional Diversity:

Shifting to a more Western diet can lead to a reduction in the consumption of diverse and nutrient-rich traditional Indian foods, potentially resulting in nutritional deficiencies.

India has made economic development over the last 20 years, yet issues with malnutrition still exist. Micronutrient deficiencies and trends in overweight and obesity point to a rising public health issue. It is necessary to investigate how India's nutritional connections interact using a "food systems approach." According to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), eating processed or junk food is one of the many variables that contribute to the development of chronic diseases like diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and renal disease (**Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2021**).

NCDs pose one of the greatest threats to public health, not only because of the misery they cause to individuals but also because of the harm they create to the socioeconomic development of the country. Globally, over 41 million people each year (71% of all fatalities) die from NCDs, including 14 million premature deaths between the ages of 30 and 70. The majority of premature NCD deaths are preventable. The World Health Organization (WHO) predicts that by 2030, there would be 55 million annual deaths due to NCDs if immediate treatments for NCD prevention and control are not implemented.

Strategies to Overcome Problem

Food represents highly significant bearing on satisfaction level (**Ladhari et al., 2008**). The government has carried out a number of awareness-raising activities, using print, electronic, and social media. Additionally, the Food Safety & Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has announced the launch of a nationwide media campaign titled "Aj Se Thoda Kam" to encourage consumers to make dietary modifications by gradually reducing their intake of fat, sugar, and salt. The "National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases, and Stroke" (NPCDCS), is supported through a campaign engaged in awareness-generation activities. For the same, a number of brief videos (with subtitles in 12 languages) have been made. Flyers, banners, audio clips, and a website called "Eat Right India" that provides helpful information on gradually reducing consumption of fat, salt, and sugar are used to support the campaign (**Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, 2021**). Also It can be difficult to promote Indian traditional food, especially among young people. However, if we are successful, we will have the world's largest youth population on our side.

- The contribution we make to our collective legacy and transmit it to future generations will be to adopt new behaviors and continue existing ones that appeal to us.
- There should be value for the money. Additionally, the government must to actively promote additional regional foods from India. That is the main goal of Make-In-India.
- While there is an increase in health consciousness among Indian youth, a significant portion of the Indian population is still ignorant of the negative effects of the various preservatives, emulsifiers, additives, food colors, and MSG used in the food they consume. So that the government can develop campaigns to educate the general public and rural customers about the effects of fast food consumption on our health.
- Younger generations are more likely to engage in social media marketing since they are avid users of the platform and frequent foreign travelers who seek out distinctive travel experiences. Thus, promoting Indian cuisine through social media among them will aid in enhancing our cuisine.

- In addition to attempting to comprehend an estimated trend on the flavor and appearance of food consumed by Indians based on regional and historical factors, we should endeavor to emphasize the significance of traditional Indian cuisine and explore various techniques to market it (**Singh. Gagandeep, 2017**)
- Cultural Sensitivity and Dietary Diversity: Celebrate cultural diversity in food choices and encourage the preservation of traditional dietary practices and promote fusion cuisine that combines traditional flavors with healthier ingredients.

By implementing these strategies and fostering a collaborative effort, societies can work towards overcoming the food challenges of the 21st century and promote healthier eating habits for individuals and communities. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that takes into account cultural sensitivities, public health concerns, affordability, and sustainability. It is important to promote a balanced diet that incorporates elements from both Indian and Western cuisines, emphasizing the consumption of fresh, minimally processed foods and maintaining cultural diversity in dietary practices. Public health campaigns, nutrition education, and policy measures can help guide this dietary transition while minimizing potential negative consequences.

CONCLUSION

This paper explores the factors that contribute to the widespread consumption of fast food, as well as the challenges it presents and the toll it has on people's physical health and compares the nutritionally sound base of eating patterns with the detrimental impacts of fast food, while also identifying the lifestyle trends that have developed over time. Food has always played a significant role in globalization because different cuisines from around the world have unique flavors to offer. A significant transformation process has been brought on by the exchange of ideas and worldviews. Fusion cuisine and new trends have emerged within our traditional food as a result of our survival strategy, which has always entailed being cutting-edgely inventive. Health problems are the result of people's lack of information about the numerous types of international cuisine provided and their own eating habits. New consuming patterns have replaced traditional food consumption patterns. Youth is a country's greatest resource and source of power. We choose to comprehend the youth's preference for our cuisine in order to guarantee the beneficial change. We can educate our populace about our diverse cuisine using the right information and

standard operating procedures while considering the potential health effects. This can be done by developing infrastructure, getting government assistance, and promoting tourism by making Indian cuisine a distinct brand. In order to transform Indian cuisine into the healthiest cuisine in the world while global cuisine gains popularity in India, we also need to push the boundaries of traditional cooking methods.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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