

# Food for thought or thought about food

## Editorial

COVID-19 has taught us a plethora of lessons and changed many aspects of our lives ranging from healthcare to social norms. It has brought about a great awareness about health and made the human race focus on lifestyle and diet. Our dietary patterns have undergone sea change owing to the hurtling influences from the food industry. Diet patterns in various parts of the world are closely connected to the nature subjected to the availability during different seasons. This was intuitive in terms of what suits better as per natural availability and environment. For instance, dietary pattern in India is connected to local ecosystem and the traditional Indian food habits were very diverse. Nowadays, it is becoming monocultural. Due to availability of all types of food in all seasons, our food habits are no longer in accordance with the seasonal changes. Of late our diet is no longer focused on nutrition, but based on our aspirations and in comparison to what others eat and consider as “in-thing” or modern. Due to raised incomes and changing lifestyles, our connoisseurs are filled with food available across the continents. The science of food blended with cultural practices is something we grew up with. Now, we are giving up the indigenous knowledge and listening to the ads backed by industries to quench our appetite.

Intermittent fasting, on other hand has become a fad these days. People are so obsessed with the concept of slimness that nutritional deficiencies occurring as an outcome of faulty eating are often ignored. Eating habits among children have also undergone U-turn, mostly influenced by television ads. Due to industrialization and working females, more and more packed food as well as fast food has replaced the traditional dietary patterns. It's high time to contemplate about the food we consume every day.<sup>1-9</sup>

The ancient text of Ayurveda, Charaka Samhita defines an analogy between the human body and a building. Just as any building requires pillars for its support. Food is considered as the foremost pillar for maintenance of healthy human body as a structure. It is interesting to note that seasonal regimen has been explained in detail including food, dress, and code of conduct in different seasons and Preventive health has also been given a priority. Hence, the Ayurvedic treatment also emphasizes on Ahara (Food), Vihara (Proper lifestyle) and finally Oushadha (medicine). Ayurvedic classical literatures attribute prime importance to nutrition dynamics, nutrition discipline, prophylactic nutritional interventions, and nutraceuticals with vast description.

Whenever man lives in harmony with nature, health is restored. On the contrary when man moves away from nature, it finds its own ways to teach lessons about its importance. This concept has been reflected in Ayurvedic medical literature thousands of years ago wherein human body is referred to as microcosm and nature as Macrocosm. Ayurveda says that changes occurring in Macrocosm has its impact on microcosm i.e. human body.

The doctrine of signature conveys that the clues are embodied in nature. For instance, for treating anemia, red coloured beet root, and red coloured pomegranate are excellent foods. Research has proven that pomegranate (*Punica granatum*) fruits mentioned in Ayurveda as a Rasayana and as a dietary supplement in iron deficiency anemia, is in fact a good hematinic and has great potential in the management of anemia.

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Jackfruit is now clinically proven to reduce blood sugar levels in Diabetes patients. It has been a major element of diet in many countries enjoying tropical climate.

Ayurvedic perspective of food and nutrition is unique and different from the modern perspective. Calories and age wise nutrition constitute the major features of modern dietetics. However, Agni (Metabolic rate) and Prakruti (Genotype) influences the eating and digestive aspects as per Ayurveda. It has been established through genetic research that the age old concepts of Ayurveda like Prakruti and Agni have relevance even today. In the light of modern or current science, evidences have been collected regarding the concepts of prakriti and its relation to metabolic pathways, chronic diseases, and various genotypes.

Rapid changes in diet and lifestyle have led to a major emerging shift towards non communicable diseases (NCDs) such as Diabetes, Hypertension, Stroke, Obesity etc. Nutrition and dietetics have been given utmost importance in many traditional forms of medicine before its role in curative medicine started to decline during last century. Now, there is a renaissance and renewed interest towards dietetics and nutritional strategies to improve immunity or even ‘reverse’ the disease process itself.

Ayurveda emphasizes on the concept called as “Langhana” which means taking light food or skipping food at times which said to be the best medicine for all ailments. The religious practices in many communities adopt fasting once in month or at times during particular festivals. It is interesting to note that the same concept of fasting activates a process in the body called autophagy. Japanese cell biologist Yoshinori Ohsumi has been awarded the prestigious Nobel Prize in Medicine in 2016 for his research on how cells recycle and renew their content by autophagy. Fasting activates autophagy, which helps slow down the aging process and has a positive impact on cell renewal. Even the dogs refuse food temporarily in case of stomach upset and that is the first and simplest response to get back to normalcy. There is so much of wisdom in traditional practices of dietetics hitherto ignored.

Before the onset of COVID-19, the doctors cautioned about nutrition, but consumers valued the taste. Now, we no longer look at food as the source of nutrition, but also look for immunity boosting properties. According to a study by online content discovery platform

SEMrush. the online search on immunity boost topped the list of queries during March and April 2020.<sup>1-9</sup> Probiotics and their role in improving immunity also enjoyed surge in online queries. The pandemic has brought great insights that just popping a pill may not give solution to many medical ailments. Despite our huge claims of scientific advancements and achievements, we could not handle a tiny virus properly. The lockdown in many countries compelled people to cook and bake their food. It has made us realize “Let thy food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food”.

It time to relook and revisit the traditional medicines to unravel their secrets of maintaining health with good dietary practices.

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## Conflicts of interest

Declare if any conflict of interest exists.

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