

# **Role of Food and Nutrition in Promoting Health and Well-being**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Food and nutrition is regarded as one of the indispensable aspects that lead to effective growth and development and health and well-being. Food provides the individuals with the energy that is needed in the implementation of tasks and activities. In addition, the individuals are able to treat various health problems and illnesses. There are numerous food items, which are consumed by the individuals in accordance to their liking and preferences. In some cases, the individuals are pure vegetarians and refrain from the consumption of non-vegetarian food items, whereas, in other cases, they consume simple meals, comprising of milk, fruits, bread and vegetables and so forth. The health conditions of the individuals are regarded as vital that enable them to make selection of the food items they want to consume. On the other hand, skipping meals and abstaining from the consumption of food items, providing essential nutrients cause health problems and illnesses. Therefore, the individuals, belonging to all age groups, communities, categories and backgrounds need to pay adequate attention towards their diet and nutrition on regular basis. The main areas that are taken into account in this research paper include meaning and significance of food and nutrition, functions of food, functions of nutrients, and factors influencing food and nutrition.

**Key Words :** Food, Health, Health Problems Illnesses, Nutrition, Well-being

## **INTRODUCTION**

Food and nutrition is regarded as one of the indispensable aspects, which leads to effective growth and development. The individuals belonging to various age groups, categories and backgrounds need to obtain the essential nutrients, which are regarded as crucial in boosting the energy levels. An appropriate diet contributes to healthy development, healthy ageing and greater resilience against diseases. On the other hand, lack of essential nutrients in one's diet leads to health problems and illnesses. There is an enormous potential to develop new products, health interventions and initiation of more accurate dietary guidelines will lead to improvement in health conditions through nutrition. When the individuals recognise the meaning of this potential, they will be able to understand that it is crucial for them to meet their dietary needs and requirements in an appropriate manner. It is

essential to develop the food processing techniques to make the diets healthier (Food, Nutrition and Health, 2020).

Food and nutrition are the ways through which the individuals obtain the fuel, which is needed to carry out their tasks and activities. Food provides nourishment to the body, whereas, nutrition includes everything that happens to the food from time to time it is consumed until it is used for various functions in the body. There are seven major nutrients in food, *i.e.* carbohydrates, proteins, vitamins, minerals, dietary fibre, fats and water. These nutrients can be classified as macronutrients and micronutrients. Macronutrients are obtained in large amounts, whereas, micronutrients are obtained in small amounts. The individuals need to ensure they consume nutrients in correct amounts. The reason being, staying healthy is one of the indispensable objectives of all individuals. Nutritional status is referred to the status of

the body, as a result of the foods that are consumed. The nutritional status can be good, fair or poor (Mudambi and Rajagopal, 2007). When the individuals are healthy and fit, they have a good nutritional status; when they experience minor health problems but on the whole are healthy, they have a fair nutritional status, and when they are underweight and malnourished and experience health problems and illnesses, they have a poor nutritional status.

### **Meaning and Significance of Food and Nutrition:**

In some cases, the individuals are unable to recognize the meaning and significance of food and nutrition. When the individuals read the articles on food and nutrition, they will be able to understand the major benefit that food and nutrition has upon the health and well-being of the individuals. The food items which are rich in nutrients need to be consumed, as they contribute in leading to healthy growth and development. Food and nutrition are the ways through which the individuals obtain the necessary energy. As when one is studying or working on an artwork or making use of technologies and so forth, they need the necessary energy and this energy is provided by the essential nutrients. Nutrients need to be replaced in the body with the new supply on daily basis. Water is regarded as an important component of nutrition. Fats, proteins, carbohydrates and vitamins are the essential nutrients which need to be obtained by the individuals on daily basis. It is of utmost significance for the individuals to develop healthy eating habits. On the other hand, development of unhealthy eating habits causes detrimental effects upon the lives of the individuals.

The individuals need to make wise food choices on daily basis. The food choices of the individuals have an effect on the health of the individuals, physically as well as psychologically. When the individuals obtain daily diet and nutrition, they feel contented and will be able to concentrate on their work better. When the diet and nutrition is combined with physical activity, the diet can render a significant contribution in maintaining healthy weight, causing a reduction in the risk of chronic diseases and promoting the overall health conditions. As the individuals age, they tend to experience a decline in their appetite. In young and middle ages, if the individuals consume two pieces of bread, in old age, they consume just one or half piece of bread. Therefore, it can be stated, there are immense differences in the diet and nutrition of the individuals on the basis of their age groups. Health problems and illnesses are experienced by individuals,

irrespective of their ages. In such cases, it is vital to obtain ideas and suggestions from medical practitioners. Therefore, when food and nutrition plays an important part in influencing the overall lives of the individuals, they are able to recognize its meaning and significance.

### **Functions of Food:**

The functions of food have been classified into three categories, physiological, social and psychological. These have been stated as follows (Mudambi and Rajagopal, 2007).

#### **Physiological Functions of Food:**

The first function of the body is to provide energy. The body needs energy to sustain the involuntary processes, essential for leading an effectual and fulfilled life, to carry out various tasks and activities, related to professional, household and recreational activities and to pursue career goals. Furthermore, when the individuals are getting engaged in any tasks or activities, they need the energy, which is provided by food. The food that the individuals consume provides the essential nutrients that are needed for effective growth and development. The energy needed is supplied by the oxidation of the foods consumed. The important function of food is to build the body. From the stage of early childhood, parents pay attention towards making provision of essential nutrients to lead to effective growth and development of the children. The food consumed each day helps in maintaining the structure of the body and replace the worn out cells of the body. One of the important functions of food is to regulate the activities of the body. The activities, which are regulated through food are, beating of the heart, maintenance of the body temperatures, muscle contraction, control of water balance, clotting of blood and removal of waste products from the body. The physiological functions of food is to bring about improvements in the body's resistance to diseases.

#### **Social Functions of Food:**

Food has been a central part of the social existence of all individuals. It has been an integral part of the community, social, religious and cultural activities of the individuals. When there are organizations of any social, religious and cultural functions, food is considered as an integral part. In educational institutions as well, there are organization of seminars and workshops. In such cases as well, food plays an important part. Food has been an

expression of love, friendship and social existence. It is also used as a symbol of happiness in certain events in life. At the time of festivals, sweets are distributed in the houses of friends and relatives. There are particular foods, which are associated with different occasions and festivals. For instance, sweets are associated with Indian festivals and marriages, whereas, cakes are associated with the festival of Christmas and birthdays. Food is regarded as an integral part in the lives of the individuals. When in educational institutions or organizations or homes or other places, meetings are organized, refreshments are served in order to create a relaxed atmosphere. The menu contributes in creating a sociable atmosphere and bringing individuals together. Therefore, the social functions of food contribute in promoting pleasantness and cordiality.

### **Psychological Functions of Food:**

The psychological functions of food contributes in satisfying the emotional needs. In one's lives, it is comprehensively understood that individuals do experience stress, anger, depression and trauma. In some cases, when they experience these psychological problems, they abstain from eating. But it is essential for the individuals to pay attention towards daily diet and nutrition on regular basis and not skip meals. Consuming food helps the individuals to alleviate their psychological problems and feel better. This is termed as comfort food. Sharing of food is regarded as the token of friendship and acceptance. Within homes, when individuals communicate with others in terms of food, they are providing care and expressing their concern. On the other hand, in educational institutions and employment settings as well, the individuals share their meals with friends and colleagues. In this manner, they are strengthening the bond of friendship. In order to augment the psychological functions of food, it needs to be ensured that meals are prepared well. Proper ingredients are made use of to prepare meals and they are prepared in a clean and hygienic environment. The individuals should enjoy their meals. Therefore, the psychological functions of food play an important role in reinforcing the traits of care, thoughtfulness and kindness.

### **Functions of Nutrients:**

The foods, which are used in the daily lives of the individuals include, rice, cereals, bread, vegetables, fruits, milk, eggs, fish, meat, sugar, butter, oils, and so forth.

These different food items are made up of a number of chemical components called nutrients. These are classified in accordance to their chemical composition. Each nutrient class has its own function. The essential nutrients found in foods include, carbohydrates, proteins, vitamins, minerals, dietary fibre, fats and water. The important functions of nutrients are to promote good health and well-being and prevent the occurrence of health problems and illnesses. The functions of nutrients have been stated as follows:

*Carbohydrates* : The examples of carbohydrates in foods are starch found in cereals and sugar found in sugarcane and fruits. The primary function of carbohydrates is to provide energy needed by the body. The carbohydrates that are not stored immediately for this purpose are stored as glycogen or converted to fat and stored to be mobilised for the supply of energy when needed.

*Proteins* : The examples of proteins in foods are, casein from milk, albumin in egg, globulins in legumes and gluten in wheat. The primary function of proteins is to build new tissues and maintain and repair the ones, already existing. Synthesis of regulatory and protective substances such as, enzymes, hormones and antibodies also function as food proteins. About 10 per cent of the total energy is supplied by proteins in the diet. Protein, when consumed in excess of the requirement of the body is converted into carbohydrates and fats and is stored in the body.

*Vitamins*: The vitamins which are found in foods are fat soluble and water soluble. The fat soluble vitamins are vitamins A, D, E and K and water soluble vitamins are C and B. The primary functions of vitamins are to lead to effective growth, normal function of the body and body processes. When the individuals do not consume the vitamins in meals, they consume vitamin tablets. The consumption of vitamins is essential for implementation of functioning of the body in an effective manner.

*Minerals* : The minerals such as, calcium, phosphorous, iron, iodine, sodium, potassium and others are found in different foods in combination with the organic and inorganic components. The important functions of minerals are body building, building of bones, teeth and structural parts of soft tissues. The minerals play an important role in the regulation of the processes of the body, *i.e.* muscle contraction, clotting of blood, nerve stimuli and so forth.

*Dietary Fibre* : Dietary fibre is the type of

carbohydrate that cannot be digested by the enzymes of the body. It is found in edible plants, such as, cereals, fruits, dry fruits, vegetables, dried peas, nuts, lentils and grains. Fibre is grouped by its physical properties and is called soluble, insoluble or resistance starch. All three types of fibre have an important role to play. Dietary fibre helps in keeping the gut healthy and renders an important contribution in reducing the risk of diseases, such as, diabetes and heart diseases. Soluble fibre and resistant starch also function as the prebiotics and support the probiotics.

*Fats:* The examples of fats found in foods are, oils, butter, ghee and so forth. Fats are the concentrated sources of energy, carriers of fat soluble vitamins and a source of essential fatty acids. If excess fats are consumed in the diet, they are stored as the reserves of fat in the body. In other words, when the energy is taken in excess, it is stored as fat in the body and cause obesity. Therefore, in order to maintain body weight, the individuals are careful in terms of consumption of fats.

*Water:* Water is obtained from the foods that are consumed and a major part of water is consumed from the water that is drunk and the beverages. It is recommended that water should be drunk in large quantities. Water is the essential part of the body structure and accounts for 60 per cent of the body weight. Water is essential for the utilization of food materials in the body and also for the removal of food waste. It is also regarded as the regulator of the body processes, such as the maintenance of body temperature.

### **Factors Influencing Food and Nutrition:**

The factors influencing food and nutrition are the factors which enables the individuals to make selection of the food items, which is necessary to promote health and well-being. The selection of food items should make the individuals feel satisfied. When the individuals are obese or experience a health problem or an illness or are pure vegetarians, they need to make selection of particular food items. In some cases, the individuals do not appreciate various food items and have preferences. In some cases, the individuals refrain themselves from the consumption of fats and sweets. Therefore, there are number of factors that have an influence on food and nutrition and these have been stated as follows:

*Flavour :* The most important aspect which is taken into consideration in terms of a particular food item is the flavour. Flavour is the attribute of a food that includes its

appearance, smell, taste, feel in the mouth, text and temperature. When the individuals are preparing the food items or when they even bring food from the marketplace, they take into account all the aspects in the flavour of food. In some cases, these aspects are appealing, whereas, in other cases, they are not appealing. When these aspects are appealing, the individuals take pleasure in consuming the food items and feel elated. On the other hand, when these aspects are not appealing, the individuals do not feel pleasurable in the consumption of food items. Therefore, it can be stated, flavour is regarded as one of the important aspects that have an influence on food and nutrition.

*Other aspects of Food i.e. Cost, Convenience and Nutrition :* The other aspects that needs to be taken into consideration is cost, convenience and nutrition. The individuals belonging to deprived, marginalized and economically weaker sections of the society take into consideration the cost. They are unable to purchase the food items, which are costly. Convenience is another important aspect. The individuals normally prepare the food items in accordance to their convenience. When they feel that due to work duties, they do not have time to prepare meals, they either obtain food from the marketplace or prepare meals in accordance to their convenience. When the individuals are consuming food items, they need to ensure, they are able to obtain the essential nutrients. The individuals, belonging to all age groups need to ensure that they obtain the essential nutrients that would help in curbing the health problems and illnesses and promote good health and well-being. Therefore, other aspects of food *i.e.* cost, convenience and nutrition are important in having an influence on food and nutrition.

*Demographics :* The demographic factors include, age, gender, educational qualifications, occupation, and income. These factors render a significant contribution in obtaining one's diet and nutrition. The individuals would have different preferences in food in accordance to their age groups. The foods that are consumed by a five year old child may not be consumed by an 80 year old person. Gender and educational qualifications of the individuals have minor influence on food and nutrition. Occupation has a major influence, as when the individuals are engaged in manual jobs, they need more energy as compared to the individuals, who are doing office jobs. When the individuals belong to wealthy groups, they are able to obtain the essential food items in a manageable manner.

On the other hand, low income groups obtain the food items, which they can afford and even depend upon the places, which provide free meals to satisfy their dietary requirements. Therefore, demographics is an indispensable aspect that have an influence on food and nutrition.

*Culture and Religion:* Culture and religion render a significant contribution in having an influence on food and nutrition. The culture and religion of the individuals refrain them from the consumption of certain food items. In some cases, women who are widows form the viewpoint that they are allowed to consume fruits, milk, vegetables, cereals and rice. They are not allowed to consume fried foods or sweets. On the other hand, when the individuals possess strong religious beliefs, they turn into pure vegetarians and refrain themselves from the consumption of eggs and all forms of non-vegetarian food items. In most cases, when the individuals are strongly influenced by culture and religion, they keep fasts. In some cases, in fasts, they abstain themselves from the consumption of food as well as water. In other cases, they consume fruits and water and so forth. Hence, individuals follow different norms of keeping fasts. Therefore, culture and religion are crucial factors that have an influence on food and nutrition.

*Health:* The major aim of food and nutrition is to obtain the essential nutrients that are regarded as vital in promoting good health. When the individuals experience health problems and illnesses and make visits to medical doctors, they convey information in terms of medicines and food items. Lack of essential nutrients causes health problems and illnesses. Hence, it is indispensable for the individuals to ensure they consume a healthy and nutritious diet. Furthermore, one of the important aspects that needs to be taken into consideration is, the individuals should not skip meals and consume meals on timely basis. In other words, the individuals need to manage their eating habits in an appropriate manner. When the individuals have busy schedules, they usually do not pay attention towards their meals, hence, they need to ensure that they take out time for consumption of meals. Therefore, it can be stated, health is a crucial factor that have an influence on food and nutrition.

*Pleasure and Contentment:* Organization of social, religious and cultural functions are an integral part of all communities. When there are marriages, birthdays, religious functions or celebration of festivals, food is regarded to be of utmost significance. When planning of

these events and functions is done, food is regarded as one of the indispensable concepts which needs to be taken into consideration. Friends and relatives are invited in these functions and events. The relatives and friends take out time to make visits even from distance places. The cordiality in the relationship and amiable terms are regarded as major aspects that enable the individuals to feel pleasure and contentment. In accordance to the research studies, the consumption of rich food items arouse pleasure and contentment and they appreciate it. Individuals feel pleasure and contentment when they consume the food items of their choice. Therefore, pleasure and contentment are important factors that have an influence on food and nutrition.

*Social and Emotional Influences:* Social and emotional influences are another important factors that have an impact on food and nutrition. In accordance to the research studies, when the individuals are having meals with family members and friends, they are likely to consume more and feel pleasurable. On the other hand, when the individuals are having meals alone, they usually do not feel pleasurable and tend to consume less food. In accordance to the research studies, when the individuals are residing alone, they do not pay attention towards preparing meals and consume the food items that are easily available. On the other hand, when the individuals are residing in joint families or in nuclear families with immediate family members, then attention is paid towards preparation of meals. Hence, strong social and emotional influences contribute in paying adequate attention towards promoting health and well-being. Therefore, it can be stated, social and emotional influences are important factors that have an impact on food and nutrition.

*Food Companies and Media :* The food companies are influenced on a large scale in terms of the food items, which are preferred by the individuals. In not only India, but in other countries of the world as well, there are number of food companies. The companies normally have the major objective of meeting the demands of the customers. They aim to produce their goods in accordance to the modern, pioneering and innovative methods, which would be suitable to the customers. The food companies that produce food items are in some cases appreciated by the customers, whereas, in other cases, they are not appreciated. When they are not appreciated, then the companies need to conduct an analysis in terms of the methods used and bring about improvements. The media also report on a frequent basis

in terms of areas of food and nutrition. Media reports may have an influence on the food items which are consumed by the individuals to a major extent. Therefore, it can be stated, food companies and media are important factors that have an impact on food and nutrition.

*Functions and Events:* Functions and events are organized in various places. These include, home, educational institutions at all levels, organizations, offices, public places, clubs, hotels and so forth. These are of different types, such as, seminars, workshops, marriages, birthdays, anniversaries, achievements, successes and so forth. In some cases, the functions and events are minor in which lesser number of individuals are invited, whereas, in other cases, they are major, in which more number of individuals are invited. When various aspects are taken into consideration in terms of functions and events, then food is one of the indispensable aspects, which is planned. When the individuals are invited from other organizations nationally or other countries and they consume the food items and appreciate them, they feel elated. In most cases, the food served is vegetarian. But when individuals make visits from foreign countries, then in some cases, non-vegetarian food items are also served. Therefore, it can be stated, functions and events are important factors that have an impact on food and nutrition.

*Environmental Concerns:* In rural and tribal communities, the individuals are dependent upon the natural environmental conditions to meet their nutritional needs and requirements. Agriculture is the main occupation of the individuals, belonging to rural and tribal communities. In accordance to the research studies, these individuals obtain food items such as, fruits and vegetables from the natural environmental conditions. In addition, they obtain wood on which food is prepared within their homes. Hunting and gathering are regarded as major occupations of the tribal individuals. They make use of bows and arrows to hunt wild animals and birds. The individuals belonging to these communities have their own norms, values and beliefs. When they feel that natural environmental conditions are regarded as indispensable in helping them to sustain their living conditions in an appropriate manner, they are dependent upon them. But with advancements taking place and with the advent of modernization and globalization, there are improvements

taking place in the living conditions of these individuals. They are migrating to urban communities, acquiring good quality education and are getting engaged in reputed employment opportunities. Therefore, it is understood that environmental concerns are indispensable factors that have an impact on food and nutrition.

### **Conclusion:**

The individuals, belonging to various categories and backgrounds need to take into account number of factors, which are needed to enrich one's lives. One of the important aspects is consumption of food items. It is believed that one is what he eats. In other words, the food consumed is essential to form the mind-sets of the individuals and render an important contribution in promoting health and well-being. There are seven major nutrients in food, *i.e.* carbohydrates, proteins, vitamins, minerals, dietary fibre, fats and water. The functions of food have been classified into three categories, physiological, social and psychological. Factors that have an influence on food and nutrition are, flavour, other aspects of food *i.e.* cost, convenience and nutrition, demographics, culture and religion, health, pleasure and contentment, social and emotional influences, food companies and media, functions and events and environmental concerns. Finally, it can be stated, when the individuals, belonging to all age groups, categories and backgrounds pay attention towards diet and nutrition, they will be able to promote health and well-being in an efficacious manner.

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