

Eat Right for Lifelong Health! - An Awareness for Our Children

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“Children health is the nation wealth” truly emphasizes upon the importance of health and well-being of children due to their future role in the progress and prosperity of any country. Early years of life are crucial in the development of child¹ because they set the foundation for lifelong learning behavior and strategies in all aspects of life including health. Therefore, it is important to know the eating behavior of the children which can substantially influence their health status. Around the globe today, children are suffering from health-related diseases due to choices of unhealthy food^{2,3}. At this time, prevalence of health problems related to diet are continuously increasing as ever before in the history⁴. Problems related to unhealthy eating and habits occur in 25% to 45% of all children^{1,5}, which is truly a matter of concern for the society. Unfortunately, only less than 25% of adolescents eat enough fruits and vegetables each day³.

Variety of reasons established through research regarding eating habits and choices of children. Research across the countries showed that various economic and noneconomic factors including dietary transition (from healthy to unhealthy diet) accompanied with low physical activity increases the risk for nutritional deficiencies^{6,7}. Few studies have noted that the environment at the home and family lifestyle play an important role in healthiness and well-being of the children than genetics alone^{8,9}. Children exposure, their eating behavior and preferred food choices indirectly affected by their parental attitude through the foods bought and served daily in the household¹⁰. Research indicates that children not only idyllic their parent's food choices nonetheless adopt their attitudes to food choices, accessibility

and availability within time constraints as well as convenience⁶. Furthermore, teachers play a truly influential role by affecting both natural and learned abilities that develop later in life. They are eager for training and support so they have a great influence on child health and can give children a better healthy pattern^{1,2,11,12}. Additionally, factors that play important role include family's standard of living which not only leads to inappropriate diet pattern but also high caloric fast food intake⁶.

One of the exceedingly common problems encountered by the society today is increase in the consumption of processed foods which mostly include junk food. The ease of availability, its variety and modern marketing tactics make processed food more attractive for the consumers including children. As a result, processed food is often consumed in greater quantities because it is often planned as snack food, and promoted in a way to eat frequently throughout the day¹. That's picky diet results high intake of dietary fat and sweetened¹³. Nutritionists think that parents can utilize the mastery tricks to encourage healthy eating habits among their children. On the contrary, they can also destroy their habits by tackling them in the wrong manner. Most often parents or caregivers use trick like pairing two foods that if you intake a vegetable or fruit you can get a sweet or chocolate in reward. This may increase children's liking for sweets even in addition, results in the 'reward' food being perceived as more attractive food compared to 'access' food¹⁴. Similar studies reported that using the food as a source for being rewarded reduced the preference for the healthy food choices¹⁵⁻¹⁷.

Reportedly, children eat 19-50% of their daily energy intake in school¹⁸. Schools also have ready access to snack food sources which may lead to poor diet quality depending on the foods offered^{19,20}. Therefore, more research is required to improve the efficacy of the school-based interventions presently offered for children. There is a need for nutritional screening implicit educational programs for promoting the fruit/vegetables eating in school snacks. It could probe as an intervention to

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prevent weight gain and obesity²⁰. Therefore, there is a dire need to conduct an awareness campaign in schools that can help children in developing better eating habits and in this regard, teachers can play vital role by providing cues to children in selecting appropriate food that will support their lifelong health.

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