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WHAT INDIA EATS

Over recent years, most Indians have moved away from a healthy diet and are eating their way into chronic lifestyle diseases through junk and fast food
By Anu Jain Rohatgi



fix portion sizes of dishes served in star hotels and restaurants. While the Prime Minister is worried about food habits, people don't seem to be too bothered about what and how much they eat or how it affects their life in the long run.

Dheera weighed 92 kg and found it difficult to walk, forget hitting the gym for a tough workout. She never realised that over the years, her gorging on burgers, parathas, aaloo tikki, oily food and aerated drinks would slowly but surely make her obese and endanger her life. In just five to six years, a 45 kg Dheera shot up to 92 kg. She was just 18.

"Those years were a nightmare for me. Because of my weight-related complex, I gradually lost my friends. I couldn't face relatives who would comment on my weight. Obesity restricted my physical activities and disturbed my menstruation cycle. I used to be embarrassed, depressed and totally isolated," says Dheera.

She is not alone. Nikhil from Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh weighed 145 kg when he was 17. "I consumed a litre of cold drinks every day. Burgers, pizzas and fried potatoes were my favourite food," he says. Nikhil's obesity caused him respiratory problems, joint pain and borderline diabetes.

Fortunately for Dheera and Nikhil, there was hope. They underwent bariatric surgeries to cut their fat. Dheera lost 35 kg while Nikhil now weighs 84 kg.

Bariatric surgery was also a life changer for Egyptian Eman Ahmed Abdulati, once the world's heaviest woman weighing 490 kg. Since her arrival in Mumbai on February 9, she has lost 242 kg after a laparoscopic sleeve gastrectomy—removal of 75 per cent of her stomach to limit her food intake—after which her weight dropped to 340 kg. She now weighs 248 kg.

Medical journal *Lancet* stated in a recent article that India is the third most obese country in the world. Here, 46 million people suffer from obesity, which in turn causes lifestyle diseases. According to World Health Organization, obesity

in India rose one-and-a-half times in the last quarter-century. Heart diseases and diabetes together result in 28 per cent of all deaths in India.

A March 2017 study by the Cognitive Neuroscience Society says that continuous sleep deprivation makes the brain more sensitive to food smells. People with such sleeping patterns are more likely to eat unhealthy snacks and junk foods—such as pizza, chocolate, packaged cookies, ice cream, French fries, cheeseburgers, soda, cake, cheese, bacon, fried chicken, rolls and popcorn—

which have been found to be the most addictive high-calorie foods by the National Centre for Biotechnology information, the US.

For the study—which was shared at the Cognitive Neuroscience Society's annual meeting in San Francisco—researchers analysed adults who had slept just four hours a day. When tired (sleep deprived), participants showed greater brain activity in two areas involved in olfaction (the sense of smell) in response to food smells. When they were rested, this activity diminished.

"Dheera and Nikhil were not the only ones who had suffered being overweight and had problems due to unhealthy food habits. This problem is part and parcel of the masses, especially amongst the adolescent and middle-aged," says Dr Pradeep

Choose foods that are larger in volume but contain low calories

By cutting down 500 calories daily, you can lose 1 kg in 17 days



Make chapatis from wheat, ragi and oats



Have almonds, flax seeds or sunflower seeds instead of fried snacks



Walk 10,000 steps each day to burn 300 calories



One banana contains calories equivalent to eight pieces of watermelon, so choose fruits accordingly



One mango contains calories equal to that in three apples



One teaspoon of sugar has about 16 calories

Detox once a week with fruits and vegetables



11-18 years has increased by 15-20 per cent. More than 50 per cent of cases coming for surgery are in the age bracket of 40-50 years. Bariatric surgery cases have increased 12-fold in the last decade in our hospital. Nearly 87,000 bariatric surgeries have been performed across in the same period. In 60 per cent of cases, unhealthy food habits are the main contributing factors."

Experts believe more people are eating unhealthy food. Over the years, food habits have also changed. Instead of dal-sabzi, people prefer to eat pizzas, burgers or spicy chicken at food outlets.

Complex carbs have been replaced by refined foods and oil. Water intake has been replaced by beverages rich in sugar and chemicals. People are eating less cereals, replacing them with more fat and snacks," says Ritika Majumdar, head, Nutrition Department, Max Hospital.

Higher consumption of alcohol and aerated beverages is another major factor for obesity.

Doctors advise concentrating on a balanced diet with moderate regular exercise instead of spending more time in the gym. "Burning off a barfi after a meal needs 30 minutes of brisk walking," says Dr Majumdar.

Just one pizza along with an aerated drink and a couple of sweets fulfils the requirement of total calories required per day.

"People who lead a light and sedentary lifestyle category require 1,500 to 1,800 calories per day.

or construction workers need at least 3,000 to 3,200 calories," says Sonia Narang, a senior dietician in Delhi.

Fast and processed food contain lots of salt, sugar and saturated unhealthy fats. Regular and over-consumption of this food makes us fat and prone to diseases.

Proteins, considered the body's building block and a repair agent, should be consumed at about 1 gm/kg of a person's weight. Indians consume excess starch and fat but less protein. "Around 50-60 per cent of vegetarians and 10 per cent of non-vegetarian patients coming to us for dietary counselling have protein deficiency. They are aged 25-47.

About 40 per cent of patients suffer from deficiency of micro nutrients such as potassium, zinc, iron, magnesium and vitamins," says Dr Majumdar.

A consumer survey conducted by Indian Market Research Bureau (IMRB) across seven major cities says that nine out of 10 Indians consume less than adequate proteins daily. It added 91 per cent of vegetarians and 85 per cent of non-vegetarians were found deficient. Protein intake of 88 per cent people was less than the ideal amount, indicating a huge gap in protein requirements and consumption for each individual. The survey added that Mumbai had the lowest protein gap of 68 per cent, in contrast to Delhi's high gap of 99 per cent. They interviewed 1,260 respondents, which included males and females between the age of 30 and 55 years.

"There has been a drastic change

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Egyptian Eman Ahmed, who once weighed 490 kg, now weighs 248 kg after a bariatric surgery in Mumbai

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Dr Pradeep Choubey

Head, Department of Bariatric Surgery, Max Hospital, Delhi

"In 60 per cent cases, unhealthy food habits is the main factor of obesity. In the last five years, cases in the age group of 11 to 18 years have increased by 15-20 per cent. Over 50 per cent of bariatric surgery cases are in the age group of 40-50 years."