



## Malnutrition: food prejudice and preconceptions

Irin Das<sup>1</sup>, Sonia Biswas<sup>2</sup>, Souvik Tewari<sup>3\*</sup> and Ishani Ganguly<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>M.Sc. Student in Food and Nutrition, Department of Food and Nutrition, Swami Vivekananda University, Barrackpore, W.B., India.

<sup>2</sup>M.Sc. Student in Food and Nutrition, Department of Food and Nutrition, Swami Vivekananda University, Barrackpore, W.B., India.

<sup>3\*</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of Food and Nutrition, Swami Vivekananda University, W.B., India.

<sup>4</sup>Academic Co-Ordinator and Trainer, FSTN Exploration Foundation, W.B., India.

**\*Corresponding Author:** Souvik Tewari

\*Assistant Professor, Department of Food and Nutrition, Swami Vivekananda University, W.B., India.  
Email: souvik@svu.ac.in

Article History	Abstract
Received: 30/09/2023 Revised: 15/10/2023 Accepted: 30/10/2023	Food is responsible for body building, energy yielding, protection and regulation and maintenance of health. Food prejudice and preconceptions can effect on human nutrition. Some people have a lot of preconceived notions or prejudices regarding different foods. People sometimes have preconceived notions about "banana" and "egg," but a banana is a wonderful source of potassium and an antioxidant like vitamin C that support heart health, blood pressure regulation, and the prevention of cancer and asthma. However, some individuals think that eating an egg or a banana in the morning, while travelling, or right before an exam brings ill luck. However, most individuals are unaware of the reasons why a banana is bad for your health in the morning. Some individuals think that if they view it first thing in the morning, their entire day would be terrible or wasted. All this prejudice and preconception directly related to malnutrition. This review paper shows that food prejudice and preconceptions often lead to malnutrition and malnutrition associated disorders. By imparting scientific facts, this article hopes to break down preconceived notions or prejudices about food to prevent malnutrition.
CC License CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0	<b>Keywords:</b> food prejudice, human health, malnutrition, nutrients deficiency, trust, luck

### 1. Introduction:

There are many preconceptions regarding food (Tewari *et al.*, 2020) in rural and modern urban cultures whose effect may have subdued to a certain extent over time but are still influencing our health badly (Welshman *et al.*, 2023). People tend to believe these preconceptions as people have been moulded in these customs since the very beginning. People practically hear from parents and elders that some food stuffs are lucky and others are unlucky and subconsciously people respond to it. Now its time to eliminate all those

food taboos and myths, because these are causing malnutrition among the population (**Ekwochi et al., 2016**). There is no scientific basis to these common myths yet they have deep psychological effects.

## **2. Malnutrition and food preconception and prejudice:**

Malnutrition is characterized by inadequate or excessive nutrient intake, an unbalanced intake of vital nutrients, or poor nutrient utilization. Undernutrition, overweight, and obesity are both part of the double burden of malnutrition, as are noncommunicable diseases connected to diet. Four general signs of undernutrition include stunting, wasting, being underweight, and micronutrient deficiencies (**Stephenson et al., 2000**). Cultural norms, taboos, and beliefs are listed as contextual elements in the UNICEF Food-Care Health conceptual framework as one of the fundamental causes of malnutrition (**Abubakar et al., 2011; UNICEF, 1990**).

People refrain from ingesting particular foods and beverages all around the world for a number of reasons. Food taboos can be considered to exist when these justifications are mostly based on tradition and societal norms rather than on individual preference based on things like taste or ethics (**Ramulondi et al., 2021**). Religious prohibitions might sometimes compel people to avoid specific foods. Sometimes, a certain food may be the subject of widespread superstition, which results in a taboo against consuming it that can lead to malnutrition among people (**Meyer-Rochow, 2009**).

### **2.1 Fish and milk should not be eaten together**

Some individuals advise against drinking milk right after consuming fish because it could cause acne to develop on our skin. According to science, there is no evidence that these two together are harmful or hazardous to our bodies or the skin. In actuality, this combination is present in a wide variety of mouthwatering treats (**Kapoor, 2023**).

**Ekwochi et al. (2016)** reported that due to food taboos, almost 37% of respondents avoided certain meals during pregnancy; however, there was no correlation between this avoidance of food and the mother's educational level, parity (number of obstetric births), or occupation. The two foods that are typically avoided during pregnancy are snail and grass cutter meat, whilst eggs are typically avoided in young children. Some respondents said eating grasscutter and snail meat made children lethargic and work difficult, respectively, while introducing egg early on could make a youngster more likely to steal in the future.

### **2.2 Bananas will help you gain weight**

All the under-weight or slim people might have heard this once in their lifetime. But there is no research or evidence that proves this to be true. Bananas are extremely high in fibre and low in calories making them an ideal fruit for everyone (**Kapoor, 2023**).

### **2.3 Desi ghee is harmful for health**

Ghee being a healthier alternative is armed with 32% MUFA (monounsaturated fatty acids) and 65% saturated acids. aids in the absorption of fat-soluble minerals and vitamins Unlike PUFA (polyunsaturated fatty acids), it does not lower the good cholesterol in our body. Moreover, research also reveals that cow ghee could protect us from cancer (**Kapoor, 2023**).

### **2.4 Indian food is unhealthy and spicy food**

Research shows that Indian cuisine is one of the most healthy and nutritious in the world. we use a variety of fresh vegetables, grains, pulses, fish, etc. Indian cuisine also boasts of a wide variety of vegan and gluten free recipes. Sure, we have our share of fried indulgences, but most recipes call for grilling, pan frying, poaching, boiling or steaming. Actually, the fact that we eat with our hands causes the food to be absorbed and digested better. Indian meals are a balanced mix of sweet, sour, salty, spicy, bitter and astringent taste. Spices does not add empty calories but elevate the taste and flavor of the food. Most importantly all these spices have medicinal values (**Kapoor, 2023**).

### **2.5 Honey is better than sugar**

One tablespoon of honey contains nearly 65 calories, as compared to only 46 calories provided by the same amount of table sugar. It is made up of 55 percent fructose resulting in a blood-sugar spike, weight gain and heart problems.

## **2.6 Not eating sugar will save you from diabetes**

Staying away from refined sugar will definitely kill a few calories but not necessarily prevent diabetes. Diabetes is the inability of the body to effectively process carbohydrates. High-calorie diets of starch, fat or sugar, obesity and physical inactivity leads to insulin resistance, which sets the stage for diabetes.

## **2.7 Overdosing on nuts leads to cholesterol and obesity**

Most people believe that consuming more than a handful of nuts increases cholesterol levels. But the truth is that nuts actually help lower cholesterol levels, reduce weight and protect your heart.

In mid-west Nigeria, children are not given coconut milk because it's believed that "the milk renders them unintelligent." Children are also kept away from meat and eggs because parents think it'll make them steal. Eggs and bananas are considered as unlucky so some people tend avoid it while going for some early in the morning, but banana is an excellent source of potassium, vitamin-c, vitamin-b6 and various phytonutrients while eggs are regarded as a complete source of protein, containing all 9 essential amino acids.

These food prohibitions get immensely increased when women get pregnant, which in turn increases tensions and mood swings. There is a saying that foods egg, haldi, papaya and having spicy food can lead to abortion, bleeding, preterm labour, abnormality in child (**Sainani, 2019**).

Normal consumption of ripe papaya, mangoes or pineapples during pregnancy doesn't pose any risk, ripe papaya has a very good source of Vitamin A. Unripe papaya on the other hand contains chymopapain, pineapple has an enzyme called bromelain, which when consumed in large quantities can cause uterine contractions. However, you would need to consume an unusually large amount of these fruits for the negative effects to show up. Both the fruits, when consumed in moderation have a range of health benefits during pregnancy (**Sainani, 2019**).

Also drinking chai leads to darkening of baby's skin which has no scientific evidence.

Nuts in pregnancy are the best source of nutrition. Eating nuts during pregnancy may lead to improved cognitive ability in children, says the European Journal of Epidemiology. Nuts are a rich source of vitamins and minerals and can be used as a healthy snack during pregnancy (**Sainani, 2019**).

Similarly, Kesar (Saffron) in milk has two myths, some say its garam and some say having kesar helps the baby get fairer. Saffron is rich in antioxidants; it decreases mood swings and cramps during pregnancy. Just that you need to be aware from where it is bought and its quality should not be compromised (**Sainani, 2019**).

Pregnant women cannot eat fish, eggs, meat during pregnancy as they can harm the foetus, is another big query. Meat, poultry, fish and eggs contain protein, B vitamins and iron needed in pregnancy. The developing foetus needs plenty of protein. Fish contains lot of omega -3 fatty acids, which can be very nutritious. Raw eggs are definitely to be avoided because of chances of infection which may lead to diarrhoea, fever and abdominal cramping. Proteins are very essential for growth of foetus and placenta. So, it is also important to identify other Indian rich foods that can be consumed by a vegetarian woman during pregnancy. For people who prefer vegetarian diet, soy products like tofu, paneer, sprouts contain good protein (**Sainani, 2019**).

Another preconception is that if coconut is eaten, uterus will become hard like it. The baby will have lot of hair on the body (**Sainani, 2019**). On the contrary, it is rich in manganese, iron, selenium (antioxidant), copper. It hydrates the body, aids in morning sickness, promotes fetal development, increases amniotic fluid levels, etc.

All these food preconceptions lead to malnutrition among the community making them susceptible to other serious and chronic diseases. Hence these food prejudices should be eliminated from the society as soon as possible to walk towards a healthier society together and to lead a better life. Every food stuff has its nutritional benefits if consumed in a right way, in right amount and at right time.

## **Conclusion:**

Malnutrition is now-a-days very prevailing situation. In India, a lot of prejudices are there which gears up this situation. Eating balanced diet will be the most preventive measures we can take. But misbeliefs related to various common food items like banana, egg, honey, nuts etc. lead to an imbalanced dietary practice. Food taboos are mostly noticeable in various physiological consequences like pregnancy, lactation etc. All over these prejudices and taboos are harmful to a healthy society. Instead of believing in those prejudices, if the people consider the nutritional significance of those foods, it will be helpful and healthier for the society. The healthier the society will be, the prosperous and advanced it will become. As a health

worker, awareness should be raised against all these prejudices and food taboos so that a nourished and healthy society can be grown up and the cases of malnourishment become least.

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