

# World Health Organization advocates for a healthy diet for all: Global perspective

Sir,

Consumption of a healthy diet throughout the life not only prevents different forms of malnutrition, but also significantly minimizes the risk of onset of a complete range of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs).<sup>[1]</sup> In the modern era with a remarkable rise in the production of processed foods and alteration in the lifestyle, healthy diet has acquired the center stage especially because people are opting for energy dense foods rich in fats/free sugar/salt over fresh fruits, vegetables, and dietary fibers such as whole grains.<sup>[2]</sup>

Even though the precise component of a healthy diet is quite variable and is determined by multiple determinants (*viz.*, age, gender, lifestyle practices, physical activity, sociocultural practices, locally available foods), the basic principles of a healthy diet are same [Table 1].<sup>[2-6]</sup> In fact, the practice for healthy diet start early in life with exclusive breastfeeding, and it acts as a foundation stone for the long-term health benefits such as minimizing the risk of obesity or onset of NCDs later in life.<sup>[7]</sup> Further, most of the principles regarding healthy diet for infants and children are similar to that for adults [Table 1].<sup>[1]</sup> Also, specific recommendations have been made by different agencies regarding calorie intake (fats/free sugar/salts intake) for adults [Table 1].<sup>[1,3-6]</sup>

As diet of an individual is dependent on multiple parameters, there is an immense need for involvement of multiple stakeholders to eventually promote a healthy food environment, so that people can consume a balanced and healthy diet.<sup>[1,2]</sup> The

policymakers have a crucial role in enabling people to adopt and maintain healthy dietary practices by establishing uniformity in the national food/agricultural policies and trade-sector initiatives.<sup>[1,2,7]</sup> Policymakers can provide additional incentives for producers and retailers who are involved in the production or sale of fresh fruits/vegetables; encourage measures to maintain the recommended levels of salt, fats, and free sugars in processed foods; decrease/nil incentive for those who are producing processed foods; develop liaison with schools/public institutions/workplace to ensure provision of a healthy and affordable food; and even motivate transnational, national, and local food agencies to enhance the nutritive value of the food.<sup>[1,2]</sup>

From the consumer perspective, different interventions, such as enhancing awareness about healthy diet and its practices among people; formulating and implementing initiatives in schools to advocate adoption and maintenance of a healthy diet among school children; advocating for food labeling so that customers can make an informed choice while selecting food items; and providing counseling for healthy diet related practices in health-care establishments, should be taken to encourage consumer demand for healthy foods.<sup>[1,2,7-9]</sup> However, to encourage appropriate infant and young child feeding practices, apart from encouraging and supporting breastfeeding in both hospital and community settings, other steps such as promoting protection of working mothers and implementing standardized recommendations on the marketing of breast-milk substitutes can deliver beneficial results.<sup>[7]</sup>

Acknowledging the importance of healthy diet in leading a healthy life, the World Health Organization (WHO) has taken multiple steps such as the formulation of global strategy on diet and physical activity (2004); development of marketing guidelines of food and nonalcoholic beverages to children (2010); plan for maternal, infant, and young child

**Table 1: Healthy diet for adults and infant/young children**

Food items	Adult	Infant and young children
Primary diet	Legumes, nuts, and whole grains (like millet, oats, wheat, brown rice) Fruits and vegetables (400 g)	Exclusively breastfed during the first 6 months of life Complement breast milk with a variety of nutrient dense complementary foods from 6 months Continue breastfeeding till 2 years of age and beyond
Free sugar	Less than 10% of total energy intake from free sugars (50 g) Ideally less than 5% of total energy intake for additional health benefits	Sugars should not be added to complementary foods.
Fat	Less than 30% of total energy intake from fats Unsaturated fats are preferable to saturated fats	-
Salt	Less than 5 g of salt (1 teaspoon) per day Use iodized salt	Salt should not be added to complementary foods.

nutrition (2012); action plan to prevent and control NCDs (2013); and measures to halt the rise of diabetes and obesity (among adults/adolescents) and childhood overweight.<sup>[1,6,8,10]</sup>

To conclude, consumption of a healthy diet and adherence to healthy dietary practices can play a remarkable role in reducing the incidence of malnutrition and NCDs. However, it is not an easy thing to achieve and it requires support from all stakeholders to implement appropriate steps at global, regional, and local levels to ensure intake of healthy diet by the global population.

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