



RESEARCH ARTICLE

FOOD MYTHS AND FACTS: A NURSING PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Food-related myths and misconceptions continue to influence dietary practices in many communities, particularly in developing countries like India, where food habits are strongly shaped by culture, tradition, and social beliefs. Despite advances in nutritional science, unscientific food taboos and misinformation persist and often lead to poor dietary choices, nutritional deficiencies, and adverse health outcomes. This article aims to highlight common food myths and contrast them with scientific facts from a nursing perspective. It discusses widely prevalent misconceptions related to pregnancy, chronic diseases, weight management, and everyday food practices, and explains their potential impact on health. The article also emphasizes the consequences of accordance to food myths, such as malnutrition, anemia, poor growth and development, and delayed recovery from illness. Special focus is given to the role of nurses as frontline health professionals in identifying harmful food myths and promoting evidence-based nutrition through health education, counseling, and community awareness programmes. By bridging the gap between traditional beliefs and scientific knowledge, nurses can empower individuals and families to make informed dietary choices. The article underscores the importance of evidence-based nutrition in improving health outcomes and preventing nutrition-related disorders. Promoting scientific understanding of food and nutrition is essential for health promotion, disease prevention, and overall well-being, and nurses play a pivotal role in this process.

INTRODUCTION

Nutrition is the science of food and its relationship to health, concerned with the intake, digestion, absorption, utilization, and excretion of nutrients required for growth, development, and maintenance of life. Adequate nutrition is essential for promoting health, preventing disease, and improving quality of life. The composition of nutrition includes carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins, minerals, and water, each playing a vital role in providing energy, supporting body-building functions, regulating metabolic processes, and maintaining physiological balance. Despite the availability of scientific knowledge, many individuals continue to follow traditional beliefs and misconceptions related to food, which often influence their dietary practices. In Indian society, food habits are deeply rooted in culture, religion, and family traditions. While some traditional practices are beneficial, many food-related beliefs are based on myths that lack scientific evidence. These food myths frequently result in unnecessary dietary restrictions, especially among vulnerable groups such as pregnant women, lactating mothers, children, adolescents, and the elderly. With the rising burden of malnutrition, anemia, and lifestyle-related disorders, accurate nutritional knowledge has become more important than ever. India continues to face serious nutritional problems due to food myths,

misconceptions, and inappropriate dietary practices. National surveys report that 35.5% of children under five are stunted, 19.3% are wasted, and 57% of women of reproductive age are anaemic. These statistics highlight that cultural food taboos, avoidance of nutrient-rich foods, and misinformation significantly contribute to malnutrition.

Addressing food myths through nutrition education is essential to improve dietary practices and overall nutritional status. Misinformation related to food spreads rapidly through word of mouth and social media, making it difficult for people to differentiate between myths and facts. In this context, nurses play a major role as health educators. Their close contact with individuals, families, and communities places them in a unique position to identify harmful food myths and provide evidence-based dietary guidance.

Understanding Food Myths: Food myths are false or unscientific beliefs related to food and nutrition that are accepted without proper evidence. These myths often arise due to cultural traditions, lack of awareness, influence of elders, and misinformation. While some food beliefs may be harmless, others can adversely affect nutritional status and overall health

Common Food Myths and Scientific Facts

Myth 1: Pregnant women should eat less to avoid a big baby

Fact: Pregnancy increases nutritional requirements. Inadequate food intake can lead to anemia, low birth weight, and maternal malnutrition. A balanced diet with sufficient calories, proteins, iron, calcium, and vitamins is essential.

Myth 2: Eggs increase cholesterol and should be avoided

Fact: Eggs are a rich source of high-quality protein and essential nutrients. Moderate consumption does not significantly increase cholesterol levels in healthy individuals.

Myth 3: Green leafy vegetables cause cold and cough

Fact: Green leafy vegetables are rich in iron, folic acid, calcium, and fibre. They enhance immunity and help prevent anemia.

Myth 4: Jaggery can be consumed freely as it is healthier than sugar

Fact: Although jaggery contains trace minerals, it is still a form of sugar and should be consumed in moderation.

Myth 5: Milk and fish should not be consumed together

Fact: There is no scientific evidence supporting this belief. Milk and fish can be safely consumed together.

Myth 6: Fruits should be avoided by diabetic patients

Fact: Fruits provide essential vitamins, minerals, and fibre. Diabetic patients can consume fruits in controlled portions, preferably low glycaemic index fruits.

Myth 7: Drinking water immediately after meals causes indigestion

Fact: Drinking moderate amounts of water after meals does not interfere with digestion. In fact, water helps in the digestion and absorption of nutrients.

Myth 8: Eating bananas causes weight gain

Fact: Bananas provide energy, potassium, and fibre. When eaten in appropriate portions, they do not cause weight gain and are beneficial for active individuals.

Myth 9: Spicy food causes gastric ulcers

Fact: Gastric ulcers are mainly caused by *Helicobacter pylori* infection and excessive use of NSAIDs. Spicy foods may irritate symptoms but do not cause ulcers.

Myth 10: Honey is healthier and can replace sugar completely

Fact: Honey contains antioxidants but is still a sugar source. Excess consumption can increase calorie intake and blood sugar levels.

Myth 11: Fruits should not be eaten at night

Fact: Fruits can be eaten at any time of the day. What matters is total calorie intake and portion size, not timing alone.

Myth 12: Protein supplements are necessary for everyone

Fact: Most people can meet protein requirements through a balanced diet. Supplements are required only in specific medical or athletic conditions.

Myth 13: Brown sugar is much healthier than white sugar

Fact: Brown sugar and white sugar have similar calorie content. Brown sugar contains only trace minerals and should also be limited.

Myth 14: Skipping meals helps in weight loss

Fact: Skipping meals often leads to overeating later and slows metabolism. Regular balanced meals are better for weight management.

Myth 15: Coconut should be completely avoided due to fat content

Fact: Coconut contains medium-chain fatty acids. Moderate consumption is safe and commonly used in Indian diets.

Myth 16: Herbal or natural foods have no side effects

Fact: Natural or herbal products can also cause side effects or interact with medicines. They should be used with caution.

Impact of Food Myths on Health

Following food myths may result in

- Malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies
- Anemia, especially among women and adolescents
- Poor growth and development in children
- Complications during pregnancy
- Delayed recovery from illness

Role of Nurses in Addressing Food Myths

Nurses play a key role in correcting food myths through

- Health education using simple and culturally acceptable language
- Individual and family counseling
- Community awareness programmes
- Promotion of evidence-based nutrition practices
- Role modelling healthy dietary habits

Importance of Evidence-Based Nutrition: Evidence-based nutrition ensures that dietary advice is based on scientific research rather than misconceptions. This improves nutritional status, promotes health, and prevents nutrition-related disorders.

CONCLUSION

Food myths continue to influence dietary practices in many communities. While cultural beliefs should be respected,

harmful myths must be corrected through scientific knowledge. Nurses, as frontline health educators, play a crucial role in bridging the gap between food myths and facts. By promoting balanced diets and evidence-based nutrition, nurses significantly contribute to health promotion and disease prevention.

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