

NUTRITION

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Balancing Our Diet

Before we proceed to consider some other aspects of the situation, it is as well to sum up and, as briefly as possible, show how an optimal diet can be obtained. Though Sherman emphasises the four pillars of sound diet as calories, protein, minerals and vitamins, none the less water is of vital importance and without it the body would perish in a couple of days as all body processes take place in a fluid medium. Water is an essential part of blood and all body secretions. It aids digestion and absorption, circulation and the excretion of waste products and helps in regulating body temperature. It is estimated that the water content of the human body is 70%. Without food one can live for at least 50 or 60 days and much longer still, if there is only a deficiency of some minerals or vitamins.

All that is necessary to devise an optimal diet is to group the foods in some convenient way. The basic needs are a good guide.

Seven Basic Needs.

1. Butter and vegetable oil. 2 ozs.
2. Vegetables : green, leafy and yellow. 4-8 ozs.
3. Citrus fruit, tomatos, raw cabbage. 3 ozs.
4. Potatoes, and other vegetables. 3-6 ozs.
5. Milk, cheese, ice-cream, curd. 4 ozs.
6. Meat, fish, egg, liver, peas, beans. 4-6 ozs.

7. Bread, flour, cereals, pulses, whole grams. 8-12 ozs.

The quantity of foods required every day has already been stated but if an individual is not prepared even to remember that, there are still simpler rules to estimate a healthy balanced diet. To do this one should ensure the supply of requisite quantities of fruits, milk, leafy vegetables, meat or fish in his daily diet and the rest of the meal can be of any article of food desired by him so long as the target of the calories is reached. We are a poor nation, and only about 30 per cent of our population are able to get the requisite number of calories and much less first class protein in the shape of milk, eggs, meat, or fish. The reasons are poverty and non-availability, and so long as both do exist there is not much chance of providing an adequate diet for everyone. This does not mean that the picture is dismal. Diets of most people are very sadly ill-balanced. The first most outstanding feature in our dietary is the very low intake of the green leafy vegetables which are a very rich sources of salts and vitamins. In our villages, most of the houses have some open fallow land, which could be easily utilised for growing these vegetables at very little cost and labour. The same could be done in the urban areas but here there is another difficulty in that there will be any number of houses that have no garden space, never-the less such people can also grow vegetables in wooden baskets, flower pots and boxes.

The next difficulty is with regard to fruit, but here too it is not unsurmountable. Unfortunately fruit is mostly considered a luxury; we often associate it with those which are more expensive and preferred by fastidious people, such as grapes, pomegranates, apples and oranges etc. It may be emphasised here that the cheaper and seasonal fruits are of equally nutritional value and in this category are papayas, mangoes, jack fruit and monkey fruit. My own feeling is that nature is exceptionally kind to us in providing us with a wide variety of fruit in all seasons to suit the purse of the rich and the poor alike. Maximum use should be made of this situation and let us leave the costly imported fruits for those who have the money to buy them.

The third problem is that of milk and constitutes our biggest hurdle. Unfortunately the country as a whole suffers from milk deficiency. Our average production and consumption of milk is only to the tune of approximately two ounces per head per day, as against 18 to 20 ozs. in New Zealand and Denmark. This is a national problem and with it are connected the bigger problems such as improving the breed of cattle, provision of better pasture land etc. but until such time as the supply position improves, we have to make the best use of the available supply and exploit the present situation to our greatest advantage. This could be helped to some extent by the following: There is a custom in some families that the milk is made into curd, butter churned out of it while the remaining butter-milk is not utilized as it should be. Butter-milk could be sold in the market as a drink as it is of the same

nutritive value as the milk, minus the fat and is much more digestible; further if it is sour, no organisms such as those of cholera, typhoid and dysentery can thrive in it as the high acidity destroys them. The maximum use should be made of this article of food. Milk is a greater necessity to growing children, pregnant and nursing mothers who should first be allowed to consume the milk available to the family, and any left over consumed by the rest of the family. One last suggestion for coping with the milk shortage:

As stated earlier milk is the best source of calcium and people who cannot afford to buy it can with profit utilise the green leafy vegetables and 'marua'.

Moreover 'marua' or ragi is very rich in available calcium and safe reliance can be placed on it for the supply of minerals for the poorer people.

Another stumbling block is the daily supply of meat or fish in our diet. These are expensive articles of food and it is not possible under the present state of our economic status to ensure their daily inclusion in everyone's diet. Their importance lies in supplying first class protein to our system. The deficiency of these in our diet can safely be fulfilled to a great extent if we consume a mixture of cereals of a wide variety. Rice protein has been mentioned earlier and a diet containing mixtures of rice, wheat and other cereals and millets would be satisfying the requirements if it is served with pulses which are very rich in protein and are commonly termed 'Poor man's meat'.

Have communion with few,

Be familiar with one,

Deadly just with all,

And speak evil of none.