

## LEVERAGING FOOD AS A TOOL FOR HEALTH AND RECOGNIZING INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTABILITY TO ACCOMPLISH SDG-3

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### Abstract

In 2015, the 191 member states of the United Nations embraced 17 Sustainable Development Goals as a global pledge to eradicate poverty, safeguard the planet, and ensure peace and prosperity for all the people. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals with 169 targets are to be achieved by the year 2030. All 16 goals are directly or indirectly related to health. (Hossain, 2024). As all the goals pivot around Health hence every individual or citizen of India should be accountable for his health for achieving the Sustainable Development Goal (Koehring, 2019). For a nation like India to be self-sufficient and to be ranked as one of the developed Nation, having healthy and happy citizens is imperative. For Thousands of years food consumed was considered therapeutic and was the essence of Ancient India practices. In India food is not just consumed; it is experienced as a divine “Sanskara” a tradition passed down from generations, nourishing Mind, body and soul. This article emphasizes the role of food as medicine for keeping inhabitants healthy to achieve Sustainable Development Goal-3 of Health and Well – being for all. Ancient Indian practices incorporated Food as Medicine, many ancient Indians had knowledge of herbs, spices, food nutrition even though they were illiterate per se the global literate standards. The knowledge was passed verbally or shruti to the subsequent generation’s example parent to daughter and son. With the advent of globalization and influence of Western culture of fast and packed food Indians for the past 5-6 decades are losing the importance of Food Culture that involved including Nutritive food, season, time of Food consumption, ritual of consumption and family meals. This article highlights the importance that every individual citizen of India should feel from within Healthy Me and Healthy family will lead to Healthy Nation. Every person must consume food as medicine for maintaining Good physical and mental state.

**Keywords:** Individual, family, Food culture, Medicine, Sustainable Development Goal-3.

### Sustainable Development Goal-3 Health and Well – being for all and present India.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals with 169 targets are to be achieved by the year 2023 (Nations). India has a longstanding tradition of Health Policy and Goal settings from 1943 Bhole Committee (Wikipedia, 2025) to National Health Policy 2017 (Welfare, n.d.) . Aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals- 3 the current Flagship programs are Ayushman Bharat and Jan Aushadhi. In addition to the National Health Mission Prime Minister Atmanirbhar Swasth Bharat Yojana (Delhi) was launched in the year 2021 which focused on developing primary, secondary and tertiary health systems and institutions for responding the current and future pandemics. With the government investing heavily in the health and wellness of its citizens by implementing various policies and allocating funds, it is the duty of each

individual to be accountable for maintaining their own and family health. Loss of our Indian Cultural, lifestyle changes and advent of Computers for the past four to five decades have affected every aspect of our Food habits. We have lost the Good Food culture given by our ancestors to the new packed, instant food and anytime eating habit. If one gives importance to Health, hygiene and Happiness, surely the need of Hospitals and clinics will reduce. The cause of most of the Non- Communicable diseases is Unhealthy Life style (Patil, 2023). As good citizens, we should reintroduce the traditional food culture into our Modern Lives not just to achieve Sustainable Development Goal -3 but for our benefit of Healthiness and Happiness. More than 5000 years ago we find the deep rooted concept of Food as medicine in many of our ancient texts emphasize on consumption of Food as Medicine. Knowledge of Nutrition value of food and food culture is passed through the generations by shruti (Kamaraju, 2023).

Food is no doubt the important aspect of life and one of the Foundation need of every Human. For India to achieve the SDG-3 we must address the food culture of the individual or family. The inevitability for the person and family to be healthy emanates as “I am healthy and our Family is Healthy” then and then only will the Nation be Healthy. It is the Responsibility and accountability of each individual to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal – 3. If each Individual focus on keeping himself and his family healthy, happy and free from diseases the economic burden of medicines and illness on the family will be lessened. Even today the patient asks the physician “What should I eat” after prescribing medicine for any illness. Every citizen should have access to Nutritional counsellor for understanding what of food, why of food, when and how much to eat.

### **Ancient text and food**

Let’s reconnoitre the Ancient Food culture which consists of Knowledge of Nutritive food value, Season, weather, time of the day for consumption of Food and feeling of attachment and togetherness during the food intake.

- Ancient India practices of Food culture should be brought back in the family (Koushik R. Reddy, 2024). The Rigveda quotes “यज्ञस्य देवम” – Food is a sacred offering to the divine, reminding us to acknowledge the power of food thus expressing gratitude for food’s ability to provide nourishment as well as strength with reverence and gratitude.
- Atharvaveda quotes “अन्नं ब्रह्म, अन्नं देवो, अन्नं प्राणः, अन्नं सर्वम” Food is supreme (brahma), food is deity, food is life and food is everything emphasized the sacredness of food, connecting it to the divine energy and life-giving forces. Mundaka Upanishad (Atharvaveda) quotes “अन्नं परम ब्रह्म, अन्नं ज्ञानस्य साधनं” Food is first form of God and a path to enlighten spiritual knowledge.
- The Bhagvad Gita verse 7-10 teaches that Food directly imparts consciousness. “यज्ञशिष्टाशिनोऽनन्तो मुच्यन्ते सर्वाः कील्वषैः भुज्जते ते तव घापापे ये पचन्त्यात्मकारणात्” Consumption of food offered to divine are freed from all sins. One who eats selfishly without sharing food, eat only sin.

- Food becomes Mind as per Chandogya Upanishad 6.5.4. Most of the Indians are well versed with the shloka – **अन्न हे पूर्ण ब्रह्म** - It is the way of expressing that Food is not just for sustenance but the divine, complete fundamental aspect of life. As per the Chandogya Upanishad food should be consumed pure and wholesome, consumption of processed food created toxins in the body.
- Taittiriya Upanishad (II.2) [Yajurveda] states **अन्न जीवनस्य आधारम यः पीबत्यन्नं शक्ती, बुद्धी, अर्योग्यं च प्राप्त करोति**: food is only a manifestation of atman and one should adore food as Atman (Soul), this emphasizes the interconnectedness of food in physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.
- Isha Upanishad (Yajurveda) “**आत्मनं नवर खादेम, आत्मनं नवरभोजयेम**” teaches us to approach food with reverence and to share harmoniously with others.
- Hippocrates the ancient Greek physician considered the father of Western medicine states “Let food be thy Medicine” It highlights the idea that a balanced and nutrient-rich diet can serve as both a proactive measure to avoid illness and a tool to support the body's healing processes when sickness occurs. Hippocrates' philosophy suggests that food not only provides physical nourishment but also impacts mental health, cognition, and emotional well-being, advocating for a holistic approach to healthcare.
- Ayurveda views food as fundamental pillar of Health and considers food both nourishing and healing to the body.

These ancient texts describe food's significance in daily life, religious rituals and its connection to the cosmic order. An increasing trend among healthcare professionals to adopt a holistic approach to patient care, recognizing nutrition's fundamental role in well-being. Therefore, in the ancient Indian context, "Let food be the medicine" signifies that food, when chosen and consumed wisely, acts as a powerful tool for maintaining health, preventing disease, and promoting overall well-being. This approach emphasizes personalized nutrition, mindful eating, and a deep understanding of the connection between food, digestion, and the body's constitution. Ultimately, the Vedic quotes encourage mindful eating and making deliberate food choices for long-term health. Every bite should be a celebration.

Ideal meal and food content to be consumed everyday will depend on height, age, gender, activity levels and genetics. However generally three balanced meals are required for healthy adults. Each meal should have balanced amount of Protein, carbohydrate, fats minerals, water and fibre.

*Calorie requirement for adult women* with sedentary work style may require 1800-2200 calories per day, while adult male with sedentary work may require 2200 – 3000 calories/ day.

*Protein* is essential for tissue repair, muscle growth and overall growth. Daily requirement is 1 gm /kg of body weight example if your weight is 50 kg than 50 gm of protein to be included in your diet daily.

*Carbohydrate* requirement is about 5 – 10 grams per kg body weight (Fitzgerald, 2021). Typically between 250 grams to 350 grams per day.

*Fats* is an important macro nutrient in the diet and source of energy, protective role and helps in absorption of vitamins. 0.5 – 1gram per kg body weight.

*Fibre* eat 25grams of fibre per day. Any one seasonal fruit as per the availability.

*Vitamins and minerals* – Variety of vegetables, fruits and salt have various minerals. On an average consumption of *water* should be 2-3 litres per day, will vary as per the season. In summer you might require more water.

**To achieve Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG-3) focused on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being, several key measures can be taken:**

Community involvement where each person is accountable.

Counselling sessions should be arranged for communities for Food culture awareness. Each person should participate and feel responsible for his or her own health which in turn keeps the family physically, mentally and financially healthy (Cicely Marston, 2016). When large number of groups eat Food as Medicine many more get motivated thus adding to the achievement of Sustainable development Goal -3.

Re-rooting Ancient Indian Food culture or *sanskara*.

According to Indians Food is a *sanskara* meaning rites and ritual performed to purify and sanctify individuals at different stages of life. \*Since birth emphasis is given on Breast feeding the baby followed by Anna Prashan ritual between 06 months to 01 year of age (first rice is fed). It is a significant milestone marking the baby's transition from breast milk to consuming solid food. \*Much importance is given to the type of food given to the child during his growth period. \*Every family should adopt a Holistic approach of Ancient India which advocates type of food to be consumed as per the individual's unique body type imbalances (*doshas*) and the natural environment this philosophy's food as a tool to maintain harmony both in mind and body. \*Tailoring food to personal constitution, ancient India believes in eating according to one's *dosha's* or body constitution and balancing the six taste in meals sweets are salty bitter pungent and astringent this approach ensure that the body gets all the nutrients it needs for optimal health. \*Eating at least one meal together can foster unity, joy, fulfilment, satisfaction, deeper connection amongst the family members. \* Fasting helps in cleansing the body and the Ancient Indian were very much aware of the benefits of fasting, connecting it to the worship of deity. \* Unhealthy food habits are a major cause of disease conversation a well-balanced wholesome diet can help to combat illness and maintain good health.

Each village should have a physician who is expert Dietician also for diet counselling of the rural people.

### **Integration of food and nutrition in the education system of today**

All the sustainable development goals and their targets are closely interlinked to food and nutrition. Therefore the policies should be brought about by the government to introduce mandatory nutrition courses from pre Primary School to post graduate levels ensuring that every individual understands the importance of food and its nutritional values. It's never too early to teach the children about Food culture (Clinic, 2022). Also Counselling sessions should be conducted for the Urban and rural community regarding Food and Nutrition awareness (Lahariya, 2020).

Ensuring access to nutrition food \*it is essential that the policies of the government ensures equitable access to health and nutritive food for all citizens particularly in underserved areas. \*seasonal and local eating ancient India food habits and courage eating locally source and seasonal foods to aligned with the natural cycles and provide the body with nutrients it needs in different season and does promoting overall well-being.\* Every family must have access to daily intake of Protein, carbohydrate, fat, vegetables, fruits, minerals and clean water. Dal, bhakri/ roti / rice, sag/ vegetable, curd/ buttermilk, onion / salad, peanuts/ til (oilseed) chutney and lime should be the every person's bowl twice daily. This was once the basic style of eating in Rural India. Add natural and wholesome ingredients in the food and should avoid the use of packed and refined food. \*Every household in India had its own medicine box (Ajibaicha batwa) as per the local availability of herbs and spices for addressing health issues. Most of the spices have additive and synergistic properties to protect the Human body. Spices contain substantial amount of minerals and other micronutrients, including iron, magnesium, calcium, and also have medicinal properties (Medicinal uses of spices used in our traditional culture: World wide, 2018;). Using spices and Herbs as medicine spices like turmeric Ginger cumin along with the medicinal Herbs like Neem Ashwagandha have not only culinary values but also healing properties this integrated in daily diet for the anti-inflammatory and anti-oxidant benefits.

Promoting cooking skills at the family level every adult should be trained in basic cooking skills which helps to promote healthy eating habits and enables the families to enjoy nutritious meals at home.

Combatting Non – communicable chronic diseases through prevention the increasing prevalence of chronic conditions like obesity, diabetes and heart diseases highlights the importance of prevention through healthy eating research continues to show that that place a significant role in maintaining health while Lifestyle medicine aims to address health issues through dietary and Lifestyle changes. Eating meals at a particular time of day Adhering to dietary discipline called Pathya ahara a balanced and a mindful approach to eating avoiding over eating or incomplete food combinations it is essential to tailor dietary choices to once body type the season and overall lifestyle.

Mindful eating mind full eating involves painful attention to food avoiding distractions such as creams and eating in a peaceful clean environment the practice posters better digestion and more mindful food choices.

1. Conscious cooking and eating ancient India preachers for mindful preparation the belief that food prepare with care and love nourishes both mind and body, where else food made carelessly creates toxins affecting health negatively.
2. Therapeutic food preparations traditional recipes are often designed for the therapeutic effects for instant formatted foods like Dhokla Idli are valued for the health benefits including aiding diabetic management foods like Banana stem and flower are also used for medicinal purposes.



3. Pattaya vyavastha diet treatment of ancient India diet is not only a source of Nutrition but also a meaning of healing. The practice of Pattaya vyavastha focuses on food choices and habits Tailor to specific diseases promoting digestion and supporting nutrient assimilation.

### Conclusion

Integrating the food as medicine principle along with the modern health strategies could greatly contribute to achieving Sustainable Development goal - 3, enhancing overall health outcomes, and promoting sustainable well-being. In essence, ancient Indian practices, demonstrate a profound understanding of the connection between food and health. They viewed food not merely as sustenance but as a powerful tool for preventing disease, restoring balance, and promoting overall well-being. Deep rooted in our culture is the practise of consuming Food as Medicine and should be followed by all. Every individual and citizen of India should have access to Nutritive Food and should have knowledge Food nutrition. Schools and counselling centres should be easily accessible for all as are the health centres. Each citizen should be then responsible for his or her own health. The community should discuss Importance of food at intervals for citizen awareness. If each Individual focus on keeping himself and his family healthy, happy and free from diseases the economic burden of medicines and illness on the family will be lessened and thus the Nation can attain the Sustainable Development Goal – Health and Well- being for all.

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