

Food for therapy: Naturopathic dietetics approach !

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Food plays one of the most important roles in maintaining good health and managing diseases. Plant food constitutes a significant part of our diet providing various important nutrients required by body for adequate growth and development. The philosophy about therapeutic benefits of food, it being health promoting beyond its nutritional value has gained acceptance. It is a common practice to envisage that a person can eat whatever he/she feels like and as long as no direct bad after-effects are felt, the matter deserves no attention. But in reality, this is only a wrong notion and it beckons the beginning of a disease or disorder. Regularity, punctuality, thorough chewing, feeling of hunger and avoiding hurry, worry, tension and emotion while taking meal are very essential to derive maximum benefits and best utilization of nutrients from the food intake. With the many different types of diets and lifestyles based on both ideologies and allergies, a lot of nutritional choices are available to the consumers now-a-days. A naturopathic diet can be beneficial in preventing illness, improving metabolism and overall health. It works on principle of foods in their natural state, *i.e.* foods free from artificial ingredients, chemical preservatives and additives. In modern times, because of advancement in technology, familial advices, natural/ synthetic products on sale, media spins, muddled messages, etc. the people are bound to get complicated and confusing cognizance regarding how to maintain health through diet and nutrition. It undeniably becomes perplexing when we have to decide what we should actually consume and what should we avoid. Thus, it was felt necessary to compile the knowledge of naturopathy and dietetics overlap through this paper, so as to provide an insight of naturopathic dietetics.

Key Words : Dietetics, Naturopathy, Diet therapy, Food, Medicine

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INTRODUCTION

We are what we eat! Good Nutrition is the vital element for good health. Without proper nutrition, an individual is regarded as “at risk” of various diseases which may be deficiency or degenerative. In today’s world of stress, fatigue, anxiety, migraines, heart diseases, diabetes, cancer, to name a few, all are directly linked to what we eat, how we eat and how much we eat. Treating these ailments requires medication as symptomatic

remedy, whereas to override the forces that drive these disorders requires both diet and active lifestyle along. Thus, one can understand the correlation of medicine and nutrition.

As quoted by Sitham (2017), correct food is the most significant aspect in promotion of good health and the wrong is the significant aspect in promotion of disease.

Nutrition or diet management is vitally important to the management of health and prevention of disease. In earlier centuries, we suffered from several diseases of “Want and Poverty”. In this millennium, in most parts of the world, including India, we are falling victim to the disease of “Plenty and Over-abundance”. As a consequence of our modern day diets, high fat, high

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calorie, highly chemical, we see a new spectrum of diseases, like hypertension, diabetes, heart diseases, stroke, obesity, cancer, etc. occurring and while modern medicine have several curative drugs and surgeries, we are more and more coming to realize that these miraculous procedures even while lifesaving; will recur in some or the other way, unless the basic cause (food and diet) is not managed.

Food as medicine:

Food plays one of the most important roles in and maintaining good health. The human body builds up and maintains healthy cells, tissues, glands and organs only with help of nutrients. The body needs specific nutrients to perform the metabolic, hormonal, mental, physical or chemical functions. Good or correct nutrition requires that the various nutrients or constituents of food – such as proteins, carbohydrates, fats, minerals and vitamins – are supplied in optimum amounts to the body and are also properly utilized by the body.

Diet also plays a decisive role in the cure of disease. The primary cause of disease is a lowered resistance in the body towards illnesses, arising from faulty nutritional pattern. Earlier, it was understood that diseases were caused by a single gene mutation, but now scientists are kaleidoscopic to the concept of a network of biological dysfunctions that causes disease. And the food we eat is an important factor in that dysfunction, in part because our diets lack the necessary balance of nutrients (Chadwick, 2004). The expanding field of nutrigenomics is devoted to studying how food influences gene expressions and contributes to health and longevity or to disease and earlier death. One of the principles behind nutrigenomics can be summarized in several key points: genes play a role in disease development and prevention; a poor diet can be a serious risk factor for many diseases; nutrient deficiencies, toxic chemicals and low-quality foods have an adverse effect on human gene expressions; each person is different in terms of how much their genes/health are impacted by their diet and a healthy but also personalized diet can be used to prevent, mitigate or cure chronic diseases (Draxe, 2018).

Therapies of plant origin have been the backbone of human medicine for a number of millennia (Cowan, 1999; Phillipson, 2001 and Rates, 2001), with their widespread traditional use in India. It has been accepted and well researched that food can be health promoting beyond its

nutritional value, as mounting research links diet or food components to disease prevention and treatment (Farmakalidis, 1999). Continuing researches are identifying specific bioactive components which may be responsible for improving and maintaining health (Avinash and Sankhla, 2012).

Plant food constitutes a significant part of our diet providing various important nutrients required by body for adequate growth and development. A side from the nutritional value, there has been an increasing interest in non-nutrient components, because they have been found to protect the body against chronic degenerative diseases (Avinash and Sankhla, 2013).

Generally, it is seen that as long as no direct ill after-effect of eating any particular food is observed, it is not paid much attention. Whereas, the food eaten, its metabolism and its storage or removal from body, all have some or the other effects which might or not be reflected. For deriving maximum benefits from the food that we eat, many factors play vital role. These may include timing, frequency, proper chewing, feeling of hunger and satiety, emotional disturbances, stress and others.

Public health can look to naturopathy for answers to some of these challenges through different natural therapies, many of which can take a role in primordial and primary prevention of several diseases. By contrast, public health can identify mechanisms to effectively deliver principles of naturopathy such as improved public access to naturopathic physicians in community clinics, increasing formal collaboration between naturopathic and other health professionals, or increasing the number of trained integrative medicine providers.

Naturopathy and dietetics:

Amalgamation of various therapies which can be related may include dietetics, naturopathy, hydrotherapy, fasting therapy, yoga and meditation, behavioural therapy, and the likes. According to Nair PMK and Nanda A (2014), naturopathic physicians use mud, hydrotherapy, massage, acupuncture, chromo-therapy, magnet therapy, acupressure, yoga therapy and diet therapy as their interventions. The naturopathic medicine, though a traditional therapy, faces certain issues due to inappropriate regulatory bodies, insufficient research, non-uniformity in practice and inadequate support governing bodies.

Grace *et al.* (2018) suggested that naturopathy and

dietetics have evolved as two separate but parallel professions that use diet to promote optimal health and manage many illnesses and diseases. There is increasing demand for the services of both professions since there is an increase in recognition of the influence of diet on health outcomes. In diseases like functional bowel disorders, there is an overlap between dietetic and naturopathic approaches. They mentioned that both dietitians and naturopaths used similar holistic approaches to diagnosis and treatment, adjusted diets as a primary treatment approach and individualised treatment for their patients. The professions differed in their use of vitamin, mineral and herbal supplements and in their willingness to recommend other treatments like osteopathy and acupuncture.

Naturopathy regards to food as medicine, along with its other principles. Good nutrition aids the naturopathic practice for health promotion and disease prevention. Foods are considered best in their natural form, when obtained locally and eaten seasonally (Tripathi, 2015).

With the many different types of diets and lifestyles based on both ideologies and allergies, there's a lot of nutritional choices around these days. The practice of Naturopathic nutrition is an old (though new to some) form of nutritional therapy (Gittens, 2015).

Steel *et al.* (2020) suggested that naturopathy emphasises on non-drug therapy including lifestyle modifications, preventive behaviours, and dietary modifications, among others. The naturopathic nutrition targets pharmacologic actions by nutrients present in food, for specific disease, irrespective of the nutritional status.

A naturopathic diet works to prevent illness, increase energy and improve overall health. It relies on food as in its natural state. This means eating foods that do not contain artificial ingredients and are free of chemical preservatives and additives (Calkins, 2017).

Chronic degenerative diseases related to lifestyle, are the leading cause of disease burden and morbidity globally which are attributable to health behaviours such as tobacco use, poor diet and physical inactivity (Nugent, 2004 and Mokdad *et al.*, 2004).

Though various review and texts provide the relationship between the naturopathic approach of medicine and the use of food as therapy and the dietetics field, it can be well understood, that the two fields work on the individual principles. Also, naturopathy may include diet as a part of the prescription, but the study of food, its

effect on body and role in prevention and cure of any disease is delineated in the dietetic therapy. According to Rastogi and Rastogi (2017), more research studies and trial are required especially in naturopathy, in order to know and evaluate the effectiveness of naturopathy diets in prevention of disease and promotion of positive health.

Naturopathy though is closely includes food but referring to naturopathic practice as “complementary preventive medicine” increases the tangle between naturopathy and dietetics. One wonders what the rationale is for delegating diet and lifestyle advice to naturopaths when there are dietitians to provide advice regarding healthy eating (Delisle and Lefebvre, 2013).

Conclusion:

The cultural differences among populations are reflected through the type of food available and consumed there in. Since ancient times, food has been used as medicine for curing various ailments and diseases. The importance of natural components present in food which possess the therapeutic effects has been researched to a great extent and is still continuing with newer discoveries. However, therapeutic sciences including natural methods include diet therapy, naturopathy, Ayurveda dietetics and the likes. Though, dietetics and naturopathy seem to be overlapping, further research and review that describe naturopathic treatments for diseases are needed to confirm the overlapping nature of these two fields and to provide opportunities for increased recognition and scrutiny of any distinctively naturopathic approaches. Therefore, it can be understood that naturopathy though is closely includes food but referring to naturopathic practice as “complementary preventive medicine” increases the tangle between naturopathy and dietetics. One wonders what the rationale is for delegating diet and lifestyle advice to naturopaths when there are dietitians to provide advice regarding healthy eating. We need to work collaboratively, open the lines of communication, share expertise and provide the community amalgamated front so as to fulfil their health care goals.

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