

National Nutrition Month – 2021

Nutrition for Protection

A healthy balanced diet includes a variety of healthy food in correct amounts from identified food groups as per the recommendations. It provides all nutrients (carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins, minerals, and water) necessary to protect against malnutrition in all its forms, as well as preventing and controlling non communicable diseases.

Achieving proper nutrition through healthy eating is important during this COVID 19 pandemic era as healthy balanced diets help to improve immunity of an individual. The human immune system is influenced by a balance of many factors especially a healthy lifestyle including consumption of a balanced diet consisting of macronutrients (carbohydrates, proteins, and fats), a range of micronutrients (eg: vitamins and minerals), and nonnutritive compounds (eg: phytochemical including antioxidants) combined with low stress, adequate sleep and exercise.

Food Based Dietary Guidelines for Sri Lankans (FBDGs) provide evidence-based guidance to serve as a tool for promoting healthy eating which helps prevention of diseases and achieve overall wellbeing. There are 14 general guidelines and four specific guidelines based on food recommended for Sri Lankans.

However, it was identified to promote following selected guidelines during 2021-2022, to protect Sri Lankan population from infections, non-communicable diseases as well as from malnutrition.

1.Add Color to your daily meals balancing the correct amounts

The essential food that make up a healthy dietary pattern include, cereals, vegetables of all types in different colours (e.g. green, red, yellow and orange), green leaves, fruits, pulses, animal sources of protein (e.g.fish, sea food, eggs, lean meats), nuts and oily seeds. Starchy food such as yams, jackfruit, breadfruit as well as fresh milk and its fermented products can be consumed as per preference to add variety to daily diet. Some of these foods together with condiments and herbs have functional properties providing health benefits beyond their nutritional value.

2.Eat whole grains and their products including less polished or parboiled rice, instead of refined grains and their products

Whole grains and parboiled rice add vitamins and mineralsto our diet which is lacking in refined grains and their products. Except for rice other commonly used cereals in Sri Lanka are *Kurakkan*, maize, and wheat. Cereals, other starchy food (e.g. yams, jackfruit, breadfruit) and their products mainly provide carbohydrate, and they should provide 55% - 65% of the daily requirement of energy.

3. Eat at least two vegetables, one green leafy vegetable and two fruits daily

Sri Lanka is blessed with a wide variety of fruits and vegetables throughout the year, while some are seasonal or locally available varieties. Each fruit or vegetable is different in taste, colour and

texture and add variety to our diet. They are rich in vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and fibre. They help to improve immune response and prevent and control noncommunicable diseases. Fruits and vegetables can be consumed as a healthy snack while some of them have medicinal properties (e.g. Bittergourd, thebu).

Consumption of at least 400 grams of edible vegetables, green leaves and fruits daily provides vitamins, minerals, and fibre in required amounts. It is the same when consuming two vegetables (3 table spoons each), three table spoons of green leaves and two fruits a day.

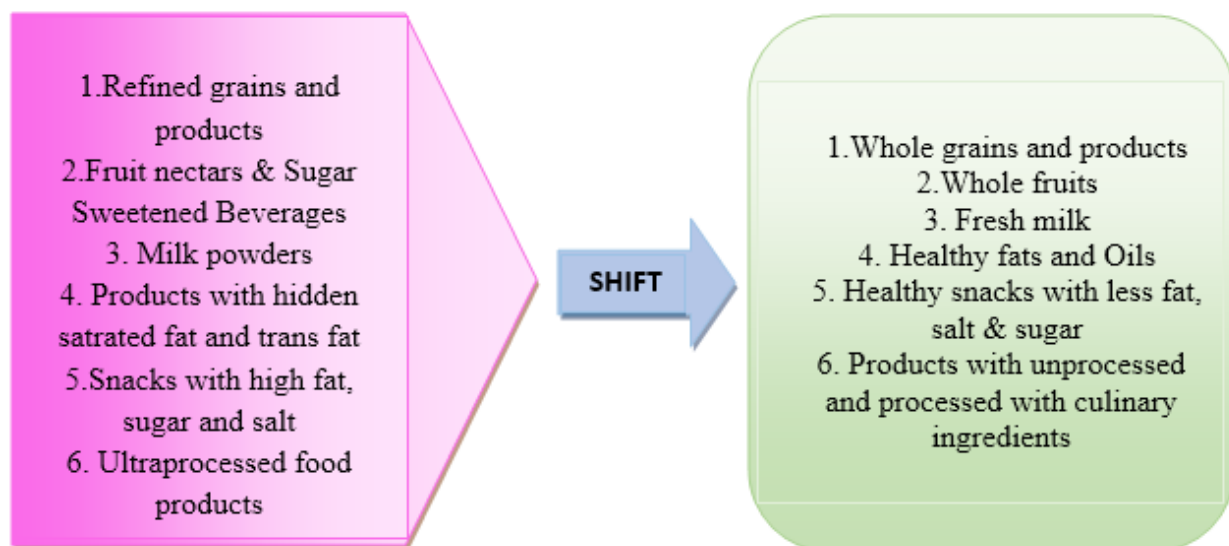
4. Eat fish or egg or lean meat with pulses at every meal

Pulses, fish, eggs, poultry, and lean meat are major sources of protein in our diet. These foods are also rich in vitamins and minerals too. Animal sources of proteins are good quality proteins as they contain all essential amino acids which cannot be synthesized in the body. Pulses are better absorbed when consumed with cereals. At the same time, plant sources of protein supports environmentally sustainable healthy diet and do not cause heart diseases.

5. Limit sugary drinks, biscuits, cakes, sweets and sweeteners

Sugar is addictive and sugar (table sugar/sucrose) that we add to food and beverages provides empty calories which do not have other nutrients except for carbohydrates. Starchy food consumed, is also converted to simple sugars in the body. Consumption of sugar sweetened beverages (SSB), biscuits, cakes and other sweets promotes excess energy intake leading to inflammatory diseases, obesity and other non communicable diseases.

Make healthy shifts



Altogether 14 FBDGs are identified to be promoted among Sri Lankan population including following, as they also supports the healthy life style and protection from diseases.

6. Have fresh milk or its fermented products.
7. Eat a handful of nuts or oily seeds daily.
8. Limit salty foods and adding salt to food.
9. Water is the healthiest drink: drink 8 to 10 glasses (1.5-2.0 liters) throughout the day
10. Be active: engage in moderate physical activity for at least 150 – 300 minutes per week.
11. Sleep 7-8 hours continuously everyday
12. Eat clean and safe food
13. Eat fresh and home cooked food: limit processed and ultra-processed foods
14. Always read labels of packaged food

Model food plate for healthy Sri Lankan adults shows the right proportions of food items and serving sizes



1. Serve half of the plate with cereals and starchy food (e.g. parboiled or less polished rice and boiled or curried yams/jackfruit/breadfruit as per preference). Some amount of carbohydrate is provided from pulses too.

2. Fill approximately 2/3 of other half of the plate with at least 2 vegetables and one green leafy vegetable.

3. Fill the rest of the plate (1/3 of other half) with protein sources of food: out of which 2/3 should be from plant sources of protein and 1/3 from animal sources of protein.

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