

EDITORIAL

Nutrient Profiling: Equipping Consumers with Information for Healthy Food

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Survival without food is difficult. But healthy food is a major concern. Diet-related chronic health conditions including diabetes, obesity, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease present a major public health problem across the globe including Bangladesh. ^{1,2} Prevalence of diabetes globally has nearly doubled since 1980, rising from 4.7% to 8.5% in the adult population.³ Prevalence of overweight and obesity are also in rise in South-East Asian countries. ⁴

The diseases with major nutritional determinates account for 41% of disability-adjusted life years among all diagnosed diseases in Europe.⁵

A key risk factor for non communicable diseases (NCDs) is malnutrition. One in three people has at least one form of malnutrition worldwide, and with these trends, it is expected that this will reach one in two by 2025. ⁶⁻⁸ All forms of malnutrition are caused by unhealthy, poor-quality diets. ^{1,2} Unhealthy diets mostly contain high sugar, salt and fat. Malnutrition and diet related NCDs pose a substantial burden on the economy and development.² Changing lifestyle is one of the important means to mitigate this problem. Healthy diet is a key component of healthy lifestyle. ¹

Sustaining a healthy lifestyle including managing healthy diet, it is an utmost necessity for an individual to be aware and knowledgeable about the nutritional content in the food to be consumed. Knowledge and awareness regarding macro and micro nutrients contribute to one's overall health by minimising poor and unhealthy diet. ^{1,9} It is essential to provide the nutritional information through educational materials which can be followed easily.

Knowledge-based nutrition education alone does not always change dietary behaviour. Behavioural nutrition

education does communicate better to change dietary behaviour. Nutrition profiling is one of the behavioural nutrition approaches that motivate people's choice about what to eat or what not to eat.

It educates consumers regarding the overall nutritional quality of the food and allows them to choose the right meal for them. ¹ According to the World Health Organization (WHO) 'nutrient profiling' is "the science of classifying or ranking foods according to their nutritional composition for reasons related to preventing diseases related with nutrition and promoting health".¹⁰ Nutrient profiling could help to frame nutritional communication and to guide consumers by positioning particular foodstuffs regarding their contribution to a healthful diet.¹¹ The World Health Organization, Regional Office for the South-East Asia has developed the Nutrient Profile Model for South-East Asian Region.⁴ Threshold values for total fat, saturated fat, total sugars, added sugars, sodium and energy have been set. The National Nutrition Services of Bangladesh, with the support of the WHO, has tested the Nutrient Profile Model in context of Bangladesh and it was to be found that the Model is suitable for Bangladesh. One of the key recommendation has been made to add trans fats and its threshold value, considering its effect on NCDs. In addition to adopting the Nutrient Profile Model, Bangladesh needs to revise or update the food standards, as and where necessary keeping alignment with the model, aiming to regulate the marketing of healthy food. Furthermore, it is utmost necessary for making mandatory of the labeling for all food and food products, on the front-of pack labels with the nutrition facts, aimed to equipping the consumers with nutrition information and for their healthier choice to prevent and control diet related non communicable diseases.

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