



Students Knowledge of Healthy Food and Their Actual Eating Habits: A Case Study of Educational Institutions of Punjab and Haryana.

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Abstract

A nation's youth is considered its strength, but this is only possible if they have a healthy lifestyle. A very important aspect of a healthy lifestyle is a healthy and nutritious diet. The present study focusses on whether the students at schools and colleges have knowledge of healthy food choices they have and whether they are actually following these habits or not. This paper studies the habits of various students from schools and colleges and also what they consider a healthy diet. This study is based on primary data collected from students between age group 12 to 17 years through an online questionnaire and the results are being shared in the concluding paragraphs.

Keywords

Nutrition, nutrients, students, gender, antioxidants.

Introduction

The food that contains the right amount of nutrients to keep our body fit is referred to as healthy food. The students, nowadays, need to eat healthy food more than ever. To keep our future generations healthy and fit, we need to inculcate the habit of eating nutritious foods in our children. Most importantly, the harmful effects of junk food and the positive impact of healthy food must be stressed upon. The students should be taught about these healthy habits from an early age. Healthy food has many benefits for everybody as it helps us in various spheres of life. It is helpful for both physical and mental health of the individuals. Eating healthy meals mean including all the components of healthy diet like fruits and vegetables, whole grains, protein, and carbohydrates. It includes not only what is included in diet but also how it is cooked. Students should avoid fried and packaged foods, as well as those heavy in added sugars and salts, to avail of the main benefits of healthy eating.

It is a well known fact that students are able to learn better when they are well nourished, and eating healthy meals has been linked to higher grades, better memory and alertness, and faster information processing. One reason is that foods that are rich in fiber, protein, and healthy fats such as eggs, yogurt, apples and oatmeal keep the body feel full longer, providing enough energy to focus and stay alert throughout the day. One simple way to ensure that you are getting enough of the nutritional foods that is needed is to eat foods from every colour of the rainbow.

“Eat the rainbow” is the phrase that many nutritionists use to help remind people to incorporate more fruits and vegetables in their diet. Naturally colourful foods like blueberries and red bell peppers contains antioxidants, vitamins, fiber, and many other nutrients that support healthy growth, and help prevent problems such as obesity, dental cavities, iron deficiency and osteoporosis. For instance, yellow and orange fruits and vegetables are abundant in vitamins C and A, which prevent cell damage, support healthy joints and eyesight, and lower cholesterol. Green fruits and veggies, such as spinach, asparagus, and avocado, are high in vitamins K, B, and E, which improve digestion and support healthy bones. Purple products are high in vitamins C and K, which help with memory and support a healthy heart.

It is critical to maintain attention and concentration to be productive and get desired academic success. There are various strategies to improve your attention (for example, becoming more thoughtful, developing your own focus technique, beginning to include short naps throughout the day, etc.), but we frequently overlook the fact that food plays a significant role in how we feel during the day.

An improvement in attention and concentration is one of the main benefits of healthy eating. Although the brain only accounts for 2% of an adult's weight, it consumes 20% of the energy the body produces. If a student's brain is not provided with the nourishment it needs by eating healthy meals, he will experience several problems, including memory loss, exhaustion.

Immune cells require sufficient nutrients as part of a balanced and healthy diet for students. Certain eating patterns may help the body better prepare for bacterial attacks and inflammation, but individual foods are unlikely to provide more protection. It is one of the major benefits of healthy eating. Vitamin C, vitamin D, calcium, iron, and protein are some of the elements that have been identified as essential for immune cell growth and function.

It's also thought that a meal high in processed sugar and cholesterol can cause stomach problems and lower immunity.

There appears to be a link between nutrition and mood, according to research. Researchers discovered in 2016 that high-glycaemic-load diets can lead to increased fatigue and depression symptoms. Refined carbs and simple sugars are examples of high dietary glycaemic load. Sugary beverages, white bread, crackers, pastries, and baked goods are examples of this sort of food. Eating healthy meals containing leafy greens, fruits, whole grains, and lean proteins, on the other hand, have a lower glycaemic index.

Eating a healthy diet for students maintains a healthy gut or colon which contains enough naturally occurring bacteria to help with digesting, metabolism, and overall health. The gut microbiome is altered by an unhealthy diet heavy in sugar and low in fibre, leading to increased inflammatory response and poor health. Prebiotics and probiotics, which allow beneficial bacteria to thrive in your gut, are found in a diet rich in veggies, fruits, grains, and pulses that is also low in sugar.

A healthy diet for students is vital on a basic level since it gives them the energy needed to perform various sports and physical activities. Your strength, training, performance, and recovery are all influenced by the food you eat. Not only does the type of food we eat matter for sports nutrition, but the intervals we eat throughout the day have an impact on our performance and our bodies' ability to bounce back after injury. Carbohydrates are the primary source of energy for your workouts, and protein is necessary for muscle growth and repair.

In the present study, we examined the knowledge of school and college students regarding healthy eating habits and whether they are following these habits or not.

Objectives of the Study

The present study is undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To examine students' attitude, opinions, beliefs, understanding or experiences about healthy eating.
2. To illustrate whether the students are sincere about their eating habits and overall well being.
3. To compare the eating habits of school and college students.
4. To educate and give recommendations to follow healthy eating habits to students.

Material and Methods

The study consists of 58 students of school and college from Chandigarh, Punjab and Haryana being 81% females and 19% males. The participants were aged between 12 and 20 years and they filled an online questionnaire titled “Students’ Knowledge of Healthy Food and Their Actual Eating Habits: A Case Study of Educational Institutions of Punjab and Haryana”. This study was conducted to study whether these students are aware of their eating patterns and whether they consider the health consequences of eating junk food. The questionnaire was shared online via whatsapp groups and emails and those who were willing to share information were asked to fill them. If more students were willing to share, the sample size would have been big and more reliable.

Results of the study

The following are the results that are analysed on the basis of the collected data:

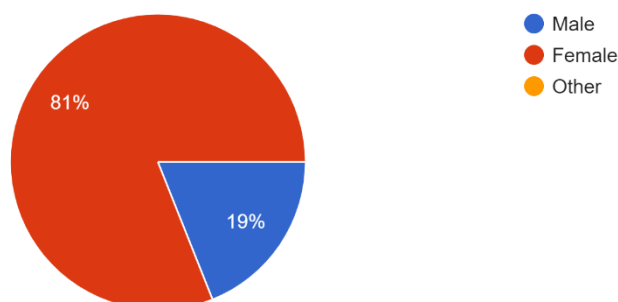
❖ Number of Respondents:

The questionnaire was shared through google form and the responses were received through the same medium and each respondent shared their individual e-mail address. The total number of respondents are 58.

❖ Composition:

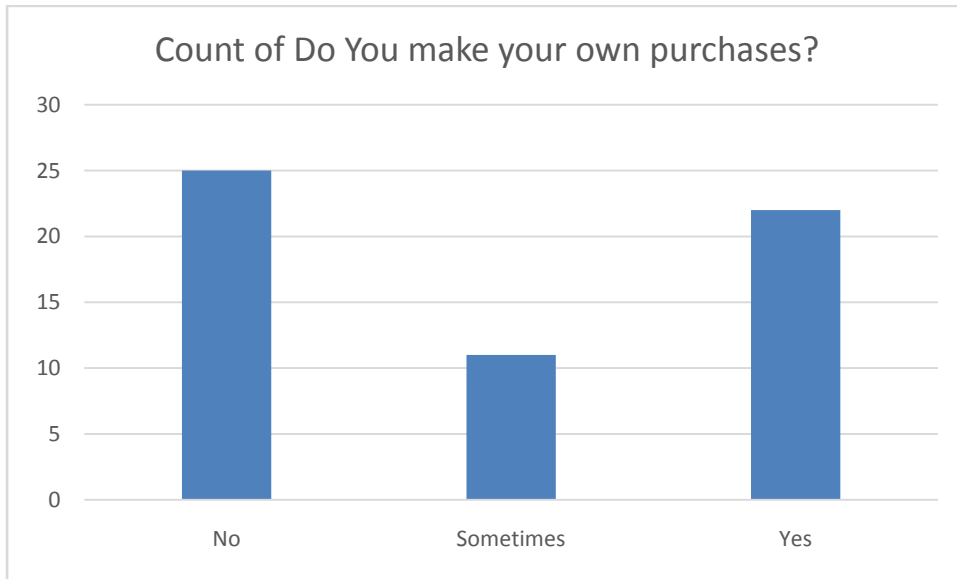
The respondents are all students from schools and colleges from Punjab, Haryana and Chandigarh. The classes range from 5th to Post Graduation, 10 students from schools and 48 students from colleges participated in the study voluntarily. Out of these, majority of respondents were from Haryana and some are from Chandigarh and Punjab. 81% of the respondents are females and 19% are males.

Gender
58 responses

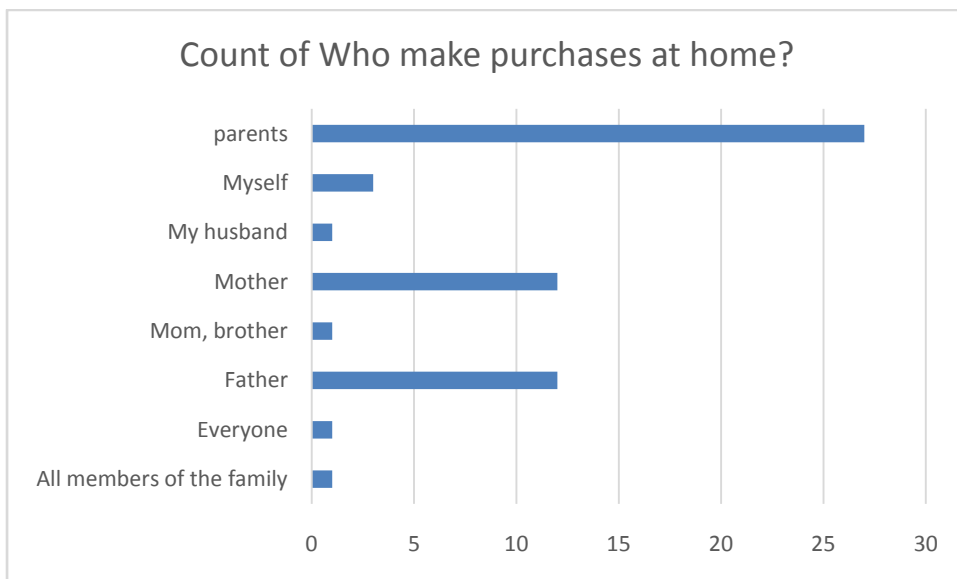


Various questions were asked from the students regarding their eating habits. The following analysis of the responses have been done:

❖ **Do you make your own purchases? / Who makes purchases at home?**



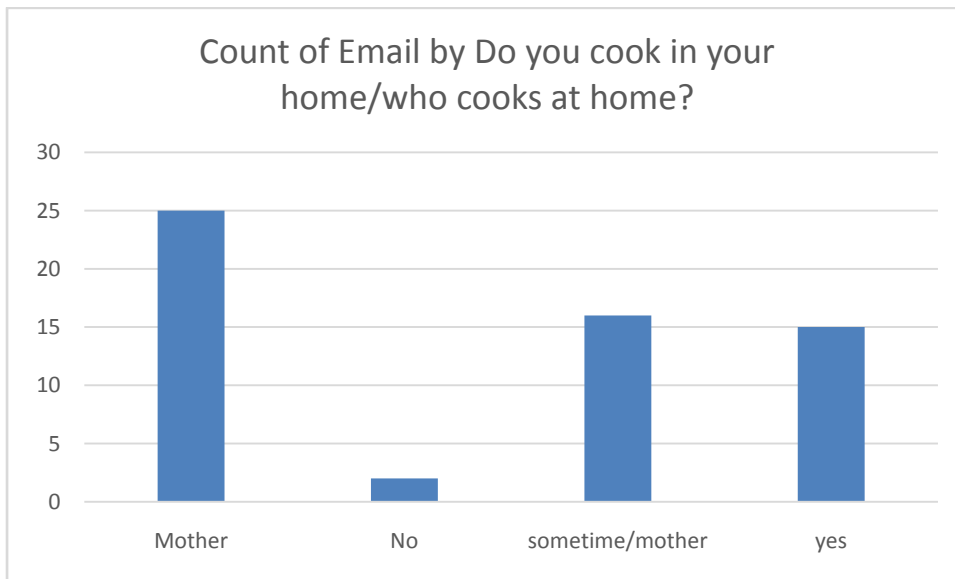
25 out of 58 respondents said that the purchases are not made by them, 22 said they make purchases and 11 said that they make purchases sometimes.



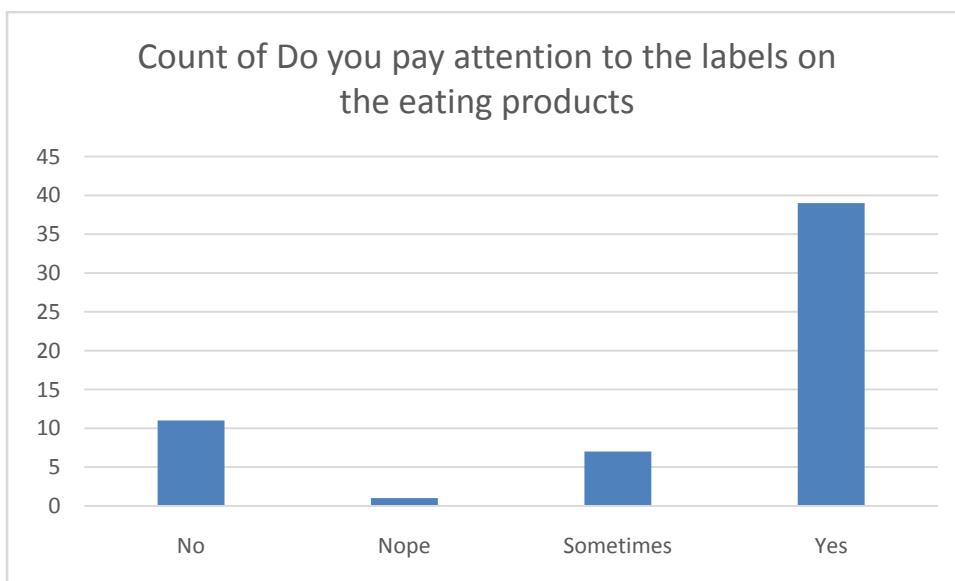
As regards the question that who makes purchases 51 students said that their parents either father, mother or both make purchases, 3 said they make purchases themselves and rest said that anyone can make purchases as per need.

❖ **Who cooks at home?**

In majority of households ie 41 mother cooks along with their daughters, 15 girl students said they cook at home and one student said that he does not cook at home.



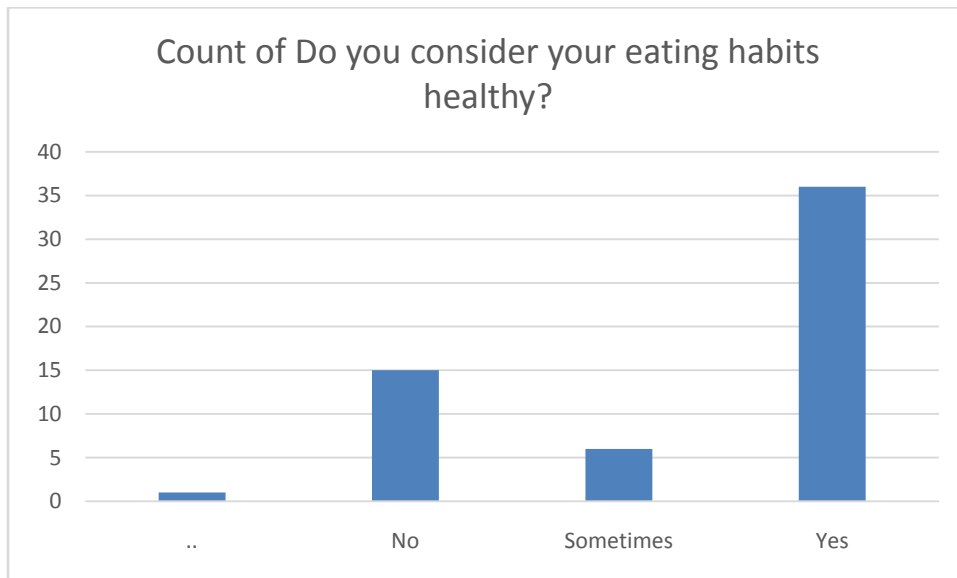
❖ **Do you pay attention to the labels of the products while purchasing?**



❖ **What do you consider a healthy diet?**

When asked what they consider a healthy diet, students had varied views. Some consider that a healthy diet comprises of eating twice or thrice times a day, some say that the diet should have all the essential nutritional elements like carbohydrates, proteins, fibre etc, some consider it should include fruits,vegetables, milk etc. One of the respondents considered that the meal should be such that it should increase your happiness.

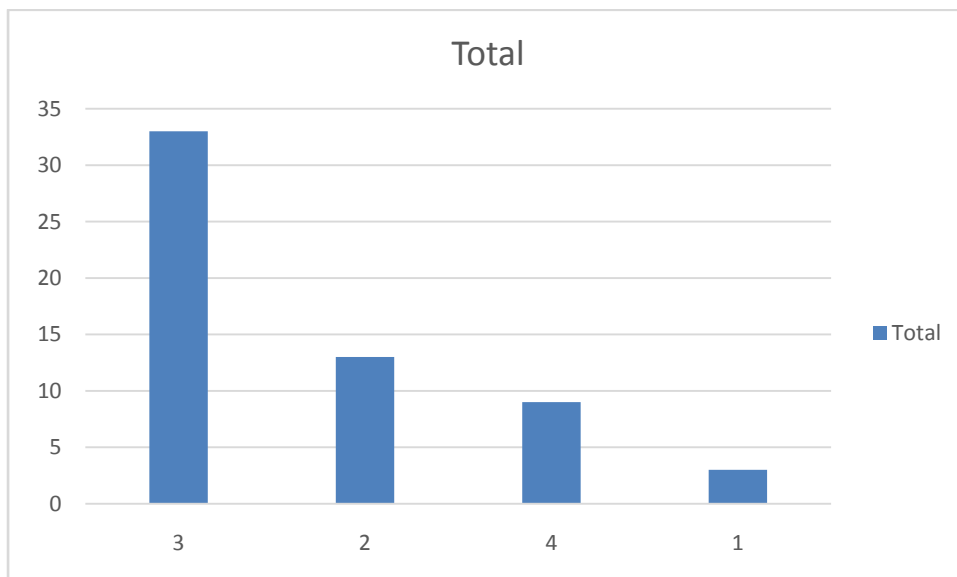
❖ **Do you consider your eating habits healthy?**



Out of 58 respondents, 36 considered their diet to be healthy, 15 knew that they are eating unhealthy diet but making no improvement and 6 thought they sometimes eat healthy and sometimes eat junk.

❖ **How may meals do you eat in a day?**

Typically, majority of respondents i.e., 33 eat 3 meals a day, 13 eat twice a day, 9 respondents eat 4 meals a day and 3 of them eat only once a day.

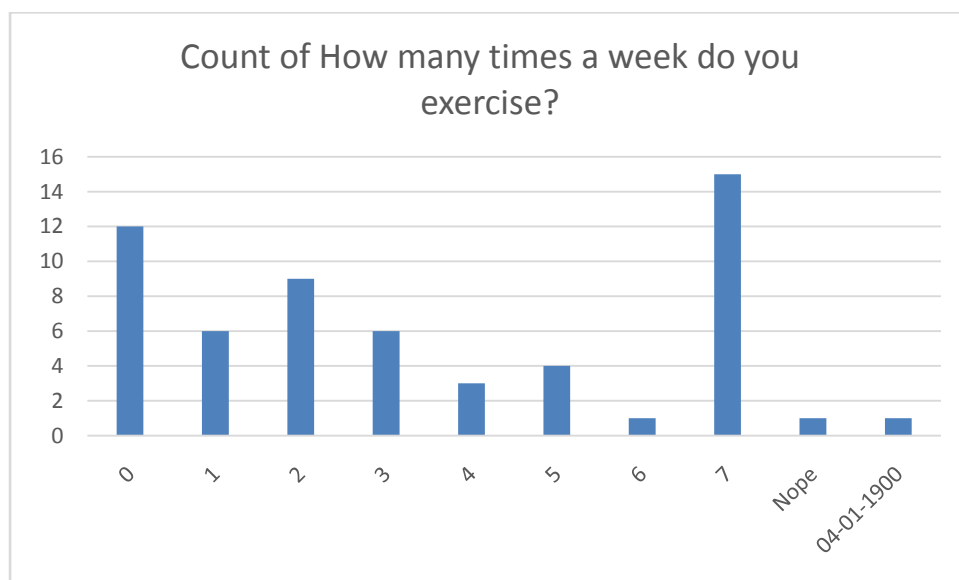


❖ **Do you eat fruits and vegetables?**

Almost all the respondents said yes to this question, all include fruits and vegetables in their diet.

❖ **How many time in a day do you exercise?**

When asked about exercise, again the students had different responses, some don't exercise at all and some are pretty regular in their exercise routine.



Limitations of the study

The limitation of the study was that it was an online survey and the respondents were not contacted personally and the sample size was small and covering a small geographical area.

Recommendations and Conclusions

In conclusion it is observed that the students are largely aware of the healthy diets they can follow but some of them consider taste is more important, therefore they derive pleasure by eating unhealthy and junk food. They are educated and know that they should follow a healthy routine and diet but only some of them are following it. Therefore, following recommendations are made for students, so they may lead a healthy life.

Tips To Maintain a Healthy Diet For Students

Here are a few tips to maintain a healthy diet for students.

- **Eat A Nutritious Breakfast** - According to studies, skipping breakfast has a negative impact on academic performance. If you don't have time to prepare proper breakfast or eat your breakfast, grab toast, a fruit, or some juice. Your body will thank you.
- **Make Intelligent Food Choices** - Choose a half-cheese pizza, boiled potatoes, or a green salad with low-calorie dressing. High-fat foods like french fries, fried chicken, and cheese sandwiches should be avoided.

- **Carry Healthy Snacks** - If you are hungry late at night while studying, you don't be lured by vending machine candies, chips, or ice cream. Instead, choose to have fresh or dry fruits, peanuts, unbuttered popcorn, white rice, or whole wheat biscuits. These are all great options for late-night study sessions.
- **Eat Calcium-Rich Food** - To avoid osteoporosis - a condition that makes the bones weak and brittle - later in life, individuals in their early twenties should be building up calcium stores in their bodies. If you don't like milk, replace it with low-fat yogurt, low-fat cheese, and plenty of green leafy vegetables.
- **Lose Weight with Caution** - Starvation and/or quick-fix diets almost always backfire and are dangerous. The belief that eating certain foods in specific combinations can help you lose weight is false. Eating a balanced diet and exercising are the only safe ways of reducing weight, feeling more comfortable while doing it, and maintaining your weight.
- **Limit Your Sugar Intake** - Sugar provides calories but few other nutrients. It is also a major contributor to tooth damage. Use it carefully and instead use diet sweeteners to sweeten coffee, tea, cereal, and fruit.
- **Drink Plenty of Water** - Your body requires at least eight glasses of water every day, and you may require more if you exercise strenuously. Carry a water bottle to class to remind yourself and have it available for late-night study sessions.

Although a healthy diet for students can them in losing weight or maintaining a healthy weight, it is only one of the many advantages. People who eat a healthy and well-balanced diet have a lower risk of developing chronic diseases including hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and cancer. A diet high in harmful fats and sweets can wreak havoc on brain development, learning, and memory. So, make an effort to eat a diet that is high in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and unsaturated fats, and feel the benefits of a nutritious diet.

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