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A review: Impact of processed (packaged) food versus fresh seasonal diet on human health (an integrative perspective based on nutrition science, Bharatiya Gyan Parampara, and preventive healthcare)

AK Dwivedi

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Abstract

The rapid replacement of traditional diets with processed and packaged foods has emerged as a major public health challenge globally. India, once known for its rich dietary wisdom and disease-preventive food culture, is now witnessing a sharp rise in lifestyle disorders, metabolic diseases, anaemia, and immune dysfunction. This paper critically examines the physiological and public health impact of processed foods in contrast to fresh, seasonal, and traditional Indian diets. Drawing upon modern nutritional science, clinical observations, and Bharatiya Gyan Parampara (Indian Knowledge Tradition), the study emphasizes the relevance of Indian food practices in achieving not merely longevity, but a healthy and disease-free lifespan extending up to 100 years.

Keywords: Processed food, seasonal diet, Bharatiya Gyan Parampara, Indian food system, longevity, preventive healthcare, immunity, lifestyle disorders

Introduction

Food is the most fundamental determinant of health. Historically, Indian civilization recognized Ahara (diet) as one of the three pillars of life, along with sleep (Nidra) and regulated lifestyle (Brahmacharya). However, globalization, urban lifestyles, and aggressive promotion of ultra-processed foods have dramatically altered dietary patterns.

In developed nations, over 80-90% of healthcare expenditure is directed toward chronic, diet-related illnesses. India is now following the same trajectory. Dr. A.K. Dwivedi emphasizes that the current disease burden is not accidental, but the consequence of abandoning time-tested dietary wisdom rooted in Indian tradition.

Diet quality is progressively acknowledged as a judgemental influence in global dietary research, acting as a key element of health. Recently there has been a shift regarding assessing diet quality not only in terms of nutritional configuration but also across the lens of food processing, questioning customary views and encouraging for a more universal estimation of dietary configurations.

Processed (Packaged) food: Composition and biological impact

Processed foods are characterized by:

- Excessive refined carbohydrates and sugars
- High sodium and unhealthy trans fats
- Chemical preservatives, artificial colours, and flavour enhancers
- Low fibre and micronutrient depletion

Health consequences

Clinical and epidemiological observations reveal that habitual consumption of packaged foods leads to:

- Metabolic disorders - Obesity, insulin resistance, type 2 diabetes
- Cardiovascular diseases - Hypertension, dyslipidaemia, coronary artery disease
- Gastrointestinal disorders - IBS, chronic constipation, acidity, altered gut microbiota
- Haematological disorders - Nutritional anaemia and impaired haemoglobin synthesis
- Immune suppression - Increased susceptibility to infections

- Childhood health issues - Early obesity, poor immunity, developmental disturbances

According to Dr. Dwivedi, "Processed food burdens the digestive and metabolic systems, gradually weakening cellular vitality and disease resistance."

Fresh seasonal diet: A scientific and traditional health model

Seasonal fruits, vegetables, grains, and legumes are naturally designed to:

- Match climatic needs
- Support digestion and metabolism
- Provide optimal nutrient bioavailability

Health benefits

- Strengthening of immune response
- Improved digestive efficiency
- Balanced blood sugar and lipid profile
- Better haematopoiesis and nutritional status
- Prevention of chronic degenerative diseases
- Higher nutrient density
- Better weight management
- Reduced disease risk
- Fewer additives
- Improved digestion and mental health

Dr. Dwivedi states, "Seasonal food is nature's preventive medicine, maintaining internal balance and long-term health."

Bharatiya Gyan Parampara and Indian Food Culture Indian knowledge systems emphasize:

- Desha (geography-based diet)
- Kala (season-based food intake)
- Agni (digestive capacity)
- Prakriti (individual constitution)

Traditional Indian meals comprising whole grains, pulses, seasonal vegetables, fermented foods, ghee, spices, and locally sourced ingredients were designed to nourish both body and mind.

These principles ensured

- Strong digestion (Agni Deepan)
- Disease prevention rather than disease treatment
- Mental clarity and physical endurance

Indian diet and the concept of 100-year healthy life

Indian civilization never aimed merely at longevity but at healthy longevity (Shatayu Jeevan). Numerous historical and cultural references document individuals living active, productive lives well into advanced age.

Key dietary contributors to healthy longevity include

- Simple, freshly cooked food
- Seasonal and local produce
- Balanced use of fats like ghee
- Natural spices with medicinal value
- Mindful eating habits

Dr. A. K. Dwivedi highlights that "A 100-year healthy life is achievable when food is treated as nourishment, not as a commercial product."

Public health and preventive healthcare implications: The rising burden of lifestyle diseases necessitates

- Nutrition education rooted in Indian tradition
- Regulation of ultra-processed food consumption
- Promotion of local and seasonal diets

- Integration of dietary counselling into healthcare delivery

Preventive and holistic healthcare models must become central to national health policy.

Role of holistic and integrative medicine

Homoeopathy and integrative medicine systems emphasize dietary discipline as the foundation of successful treatment. Dr. Dwivedi's clinical experience demonstrates that correction of diet significantly improves outcomes in chronic, metabolic, and haematological disorders.

Conclusion

The growing dominance of processed food poses a serious threat to individual and public health. In contrast, fresh seasonal diets grounded in Bharatiya Gyan Parampara offer a scientifically sound, sustainable, and preventive approach to health. Reviving Bhartiya food culture is essential not only for disease control but for achieving long, healthy, and meaningful lives.

Author's contribution and social role

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Dr. A.K. Dwivedi actively works toward integrating education, health awareness, and Indian knowledge systems for societal well-being.

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