

Cost effective strategies for meeting nutritional requirements



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Objective

Healthy lifestyle is what every individual wish for and food plays an important role in achieving it. Balancing the life's needs and pleasures takes a lot of planning and having a healthy diet in such a limited budget can make it even worse. For the effective proposals to be made to ensure a healthy lifestyle to people, public health policies should collectively emphasize on each category of the people. Problems and barriers should be analyzed deep, and proper strategies should be articulated to overcome them. (1) Adults aged between 18-24 are often seen neglecting their health due to several factors and few of them include unaffordable prices of healthy foods and lack of knowledge on importance of a healthy diet. (2) People from this age group start living on their own and so they might not be able to meet required nutritional ends. (3)

So, this following research is to find out the possible practical ways in which young people will be able to meet their nutritional requirements, without exceeding the budget.

Literature review

Introduction

The regular intake of balanced diets and doing physical activity are important for better a health. Poor food habits and activity less sedentary lifestyle are increasingly becoming part of the lifestyles, leading to the increased risks of many different chronic diseases. (4) The Australian dietary guidelines recommended an RDI of fruits and vegetable serves {2 and 5

serves respectively} according to the different age groups and gender.

However, 2014 -15 NHS found out that less than 50% of adults meet the recommendations of fruit intake, while only 7% of adults meet the vegetable intake recommendations. (5) An alarming sign it is.

Barriers and Influences

Mary Story PhD, Dianne Neumark-Stainzer PhD, et al., in their research on individual and environmental influences on adolescent eating behaviours, have described 4 levels of influence. They are personal, interpersonal, environmental {food establishments, shops and schools} and social influences {advertising, social and cultural norms} (6). This states that a lot of factors influence the food habits on a day to day routine.

A common factor that has been mentioned in most of the studies was the perceived price and convenience of healthy foods compared to unhealthy foods. Healthy foods, such as fruits and vegetables, were consistently considered too expensive compared to unhealthy foods, and fast food was cheaper than home-cooked meals. Few of the most important barriers will be discussed below.

1)Cost

Cost is one of the main obstacles that affect healthy eating habits.

Sometimes, it is not clear if healthy food is actually expensive or not as the measurement units are different for different foods. Though a very few studies have been done on this age group, it clearly concluded that they are also cost sensitive. (7) SA French, M Story et al., (8)) conducted a study in

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which they observed an increase in weekly sales up to 4 times after reducing the prices of fruits and vegetables to 50%. The same type of studies were done by many other researchers and the results were almost the same. (9)

This clearly shows how the cost of food materials affects the eating habits.

Cliona Ni Mhurchu et al., (10) In their study, found out that the simple substitution of commonly purchased foodstuffs can substantially improve the nutritional profile of a shopping cart without negatively impacting the overall cost. The implications of this discovery are twofold: first, the widespread perception that a healthy diet is an expensive diet is not necessarily true, particularly for certain categories of foods; and second, minor adjustments in the cost of healthier foods may increase their sales compared to less healthy items. However, healthier options within some important food categories, especially meat and spreads, are more expensive. You should consider the way in which this cost differential can be addressed in favour of key healthy diet options.

2) Time and convenience

These restrictions strongly influence the choice of food for late adolescents. They often think they were too busy to think about food and eat well. The common remarks were: " People of our age are so busy they do not have time to prepare healthy food" , and " We have too much pressure on us".

(11)

Establishing an independent identity requires that you have the options available to exercise a strong self-control outside of the home. Desiring healthier foods and training adolescents to make responsible decisions would

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be futile if these options were not available in the few areas of social independence enjoyed by these young people. Securing a variety of fresh fruits and healthy snacks is essential to facilitate this choice.

3)Meal patterns and dieting

Skipping meals negatively affects the quality of the diet. Breakfast is the most common meal among teenagers. (12) Dieting is widespread among adolescents, especially girls, and this negatively affects health. It may be that teens who use unhealthy weight control methods may have poorer diet habits. Data from the National Youth Behaviour Survey found that adolescents who practice extreme weight loss {vomiting, use of laxatives or weight loss pills}are less likely to eat fruits and vegetables than people who do not go on unusual dieting and people who use more efficient techniques of weight control (13) Another large population-based study found that adolescents who reported frequent dieting were at the greater risk comparatively. (14)

4)Peers

Friends and colleagues exert a great influence on the general behaviour of adolescents. They help to create behavioural rules, especially if the behaviour is acceptable to the group. Teenagers spend a lot of time with friends and eating is an important form of socialization and leisure. However, studies have claimed that the influence was not very strong. French and his colleagues examined 13 reasons for the sale of snacks among 419 adolescents. The role of influence by friends was found to be minimal and

not an important reason for choosing the food; however, the results of qualitative research on our focus group were inconsistent .(15)

5)Lack of knowledge

Lack of awareness and the consequences of unhealthy eating is of the of the major concerns and so; Jillian K. Croll, Mary Story et al., (16) have done a study with 203 girls and boys of late adolescent age in which major portion of them were from senior high schools and they found out that late adolescents have minimum amount of knowledge about eating healthy foods and they believe that healthy eating denotes variety and balance. In spite of this knowledge, they find it hard to go according to the recommendations of eating healthy and, often, they consume foods that they perceive to be unhealthy. Barriers to the healthy eating include lack of time, low availability of healthy snacks in schools and the lack of concern.

The above-mentioned findings state that, though the healthy eating campaigns based on dietary guidelines for Americans are reaching the adolescents, lot more interventions are needed to help adolescents translate these messages into healthy eating habits. Interventions should be able to help people in making healthy eating easy and explain the after effects of unhealthy diets in terms of value, emphasizing the significant benefits gained in very short term.

Research gap

While reading the already done researches, I have found out that none of them have emphasized properly on the young adults who started living on

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their own and were juggling in between the academics, work and financial bodies. A lot of barriers have been discussed in various papers, but the financial factor needs to be addressed properly to get a cleared outline. As this age is fast at learning and adapting to new things, I believe using a Health Belief model will be a lot of help to bridge the gaps and make the people understand what they need to take care of and how can that be possible.

Practical interventions:

Different communication tools like printed material can be distributed to the people so that it can help in creating awareness in them. Nutrition education should be made an elective subject in colleges. Our main focus is on the young adults aging between 18-24, so this will actually create awareness in them, if not directly, it could be done by the word of mouth through their friends and colleagues.

Proposal

Research question:

How can the young adults between 18 - 24 years of age be able to have a nutrient rich diet with in their food budget?

Aim: To determine practical ways in which the young adults can be able to meet their nutritional needs with in the limited budget

Hypothesis:

Young adults aged between 18 - 24 years of age can follow a healthy diet with in the limited budget if they plan and manage properly.

Research design and methods:

Participants

People between 18 - 24 years of age will be selected from the Global Market Insite {GMI} research database, which consists of individuals volunteering to participate in surveys in exchange for award points. Sampling of quotas will be done to make sure that the demographic factors; Age, sex, educational qualification and home state are represented in a proportion like that of the population of Australia identified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics {ABS} in the census of 2011.

Data collection

The most commonly used data collection methods for any qualitative research study are interviews and focus groups. (17) Data will be collected through the Consumer Food Survey, a cross-based Internet survey.

Participants will be asked by email to participate in the survey and, if they agree, a link to the survey will be sent. The survey contains sections on knowledge of food and nutrition, educational qualification, demographic characteristics and daily food consumption data. In the survey, participants will be asked the following question: " What are your suggestions for helping people of your age group to follow a balanced and healthy diet on a budget and what kind of foods would you choose to keep yourself healthy?"

Data analysis

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Once the data is collected, it will be organized, interpreted and the pattern will be identified, so that the conclusions could be drawn. The answers for the previous question of the first two hundred participants along with the responses by age band will be copied to a Word file. Then a thematic analysis will be carried out to identify the most common themes that emerge from the answers. The NVivo software will be used to help with the analysis.

Deductive approach, the quick and easy approach will be followed as we already have the data. Descriptive and In-vivo coding will be conducted to summarize the theme and then the results will be concluded.

Timeline

Task	Time taken
Literature Review	1 week
Data Collection	Already available
Data Analysis	1 week
Manuscript	2 weeks

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Peer-review reflection:

The draft for this paper was submitted to my peer group for the review and their assessment boosted up my confidence as they said that my research question was interesting and there is a lot of scope for this question to be proposed. I have not made the proper review literature while the draft submission, instead I just let them know what I shall be discussing about in my literature review. They have given some insights on what all points should be covered, and I was very happy with that. While making the review literature, I have considered all their ideas and made it accordingly.