

HEALTH EDUCATION PROGRAMME ON HEALTHY DIETARY HABITS AND BALANCED DIET

Organized by: Department of Community Medicine

Institution: Arunai Medical College and Hospital (AMCH)

Date: 08.09.2026

Venue: E V VELU Matric Higher Secondary School

Introduction

The health education session on “**Myths and Facts of Dietary Habits**” was delivered by **Dr. A. Balaji, Professor and HOD Department of Community Medicine**, with a focus on creating awareness among parents regarding common dietary misconceptions and the importance of evidence-based food practices.

As part of the health education programme, awareness sessions on “**Myths and Facts of Dietary Habits**” and “**Balanced Diet for Adolescent Girls**” were conducted to improve knowledge regarding healthy food choices, adequate nutrition and healthy dietary practices. The sessions focused on correcting common misconceptions related to food and nutrition and explaining the importance of a balanced diet, particularly during adolescence. Adolescence is an important period of physical, mental and emotional development. Adequate nutrition during this stage is essential for healthy growth, development and prevention of nutritional deficiencies.

The session on “**Balanced Diet for Adolescent Girls**” was delivered by **Dr. M. Pavithra**, highlighting the nutritional requirements of adolescent girls and the importance of consuming a balanced and diverse diet.

1. MYTHS AND FACTS OF DIETARY HABITS – FOR PARENTS

SESSION BY DR. A. BALAJI

Diet plays an important role in maintaining good health and preventing nutritional problems. Parents have an important responsibility in developing healthy eating habits among children and adolescents. However, many dietary practices are influenced by traditional beliefs, social media information and misconceptions. The session conducted by Dr. A. Balaji focused on helping parents distinguish between common dietary myths and scientifically supported facts.



✓ **Common Dietary Myths and Facts**

- ❖ Myth 1: Skipping meals helps in maintaining a healthy weight.
- ✚ Fact: Regular and balanced meals are important for maintaining adequate nutrition. Skipping meals may result in hunger, overeating later and inadequate intake of essential nutrients.
- ❖ Myth 2: Healthy food is always expensive.
- ✚ Fact: Nutritious meals can be prepared using locally available and affordable foods such as rice, millets, pulses, vegetables, seasonal fruits and other locally available foods.
- ❖ Myth 3: Fruits can be completely replaced by fruit juice.

✚ Fact: Whole fruits are generally a better choice because they provide fibre along with nutrients. Fruit juices may contain less fibre and can contribute to higher sugar intake depending on how they are prepared.

❖ Myth 4: All fats are harmful to health.

✚ Fact: Fats are an important source of energy and help the body absorb certain vitamins. The type and quantity of fat consumed are important. Excessive intake of fried and highly processed foods should be avoided.

❖ Myth 5: Children should be forced to finish their food.

✚ Fact: Children should be encouraged to eat nutritious food, but forcing them to eat may create negative attitudes towards food. Parents should encourage healthy eating while paying attention to hunger and fullness cues.

❖ Myth 6: Packaged foods are always convenient and nutritious.

✚ Fact: Some packaged foods may contain high amounts of salt, sugar or unhealthy fats. Parents should check food labels and choose healthier options whenever possible.

❖ Myth 7: Supplements can replace a balanced diet.

✚ Fact: A varied and balanced diet is the foundation of good nutrition. Supplements should not be taken unnecessarily and should be used when advised by a healthcare professional.

The session emphasized that healthy dietary habits should begin at home and that parents can play an important role in establishing lifelong healthy eating behaviours.



2.BALANCED DIET FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS

SESSION BY DR. M. PAVITHRA

Adolescence is a period of rapid growth and development. During this stage, adolescent girls experience important physical and hormonal changes, and their nutritional requirements increase. A balanced diet provides the body with adequate energy, protein, vitamins, minerals and other nutrients required for growth and development. The session conducted by Dr. M. Pavithra focused on the importance of balanced nutrition among adolescent girls and the role of healthy dietary habits in maintaining overall well-being.



Importance of a Balanced Diet

A balanced diet should contain a variety of foods from different food groups in appropriate quantities. It helps support:

- ✓ Physical growth and development
- ✓ Brain development and concentration
- ✓ Healthy bones and muscles
- ✓ Immune function
- ✓ Energy levels and daily activities
- ✓ Healthy blood formation
- ✓ Overall physical and mental well-being

Adolescent girls should not skip meals or follow restrictive diets without appropriate professional advice.



Important Nutrients for Adolescent Girls

Protein

Protein is essential for growth, development and repair of body tissues.

Sources include:

- Pulses and legumes
- Eggs
- Milk and curd
- Fish and meat

- Nuts and seeds
- Soy and other protein-rich foods

Iron

Iron is particularly important during adolescence because girls begin menstruation and may have increased iron requirements.

Iron-rich foods include:

- Green leafy vegetables
- Pulses and legumes
- Millets
- Nuts and seeds
- Eggs
- Meat and other animal-source foods

Vitamin C-rich foods can be included along with plant-based iron sources to support iron absorption.

Calcium

Calcium is important for developing strong bones and teeth. Adequate calcium intake during adolescence supports healthy bone development.

Sources include:

- Milk
- Curd
- Other dairy products
- Ragi
- Sesame seeds
- Green leafy vegetables

Vitamins and Minerals

A variety of vegetables and fruits should be included to provide essential vitamins and minerals. Different coloured vegetables and fruits can be selected to improve dietary variety.

Healthy Fats

Healthy sources of fat can provide energy and support normal body functions. Nuts, seeds and appropriate cooking oils can be included as part of a balanced diet.



Healthy Dietary Practices for Adolescent Girls

Adolescent girls were encouraged to follow simple healthy eating practices:

1. Do not skip breakfast.
2. Eat regular and balanced meals.
3. Include vegetables and fruits every day.
4. Include adequate protein-rich foods.
5. Give special attention to iron-rich foods.
6. Include calcium-rich foods regularly.
7. Drink adequate water.
8. Limit excessive sugary drinks and highly processed foods.
9. Avoid crash diets and unnecessary food restrictions.
10. Maintain regular physical activity.
11. Follow appropriate health advice when nutritional deficiencies or health concerns are suspected.

Conclusion

The health education sessions on “Myths and Facts of Dietary Habits” and “Balanced Diet for Adolescent Girls” provided important information on healthy nutrition and dietary practices. The session conducted by **Dr. A. Balaji** helped parents understand common dietary myths and encouraged them to follow practical and healthy food habits at home. The session by **Dr. M. Pavithra** highlighted the importance of balanced nutrition for adolescent girls, particularly during the period of rapid growth and development. The programme emphasized that good nutrition is not about expensive or complicated foods. A healthy diet can be achieved through variety, balance, moderation and appropriate food choices using locally available foods.



“Eat a variety of nutritious foods, choose wisely, and build healthy dietary habits for a healthier future.”