

Eat 'modern' foods cautiously

GOOD LIVING

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To appreciate the problems of globalisation of eating habits, take a trip to the village. Courtesy of electricity, rural markets have small hotels that sell french-fries, roast meat, sausages, bhanjias, fried chicken and chicken curry.

Arrowroots, sweet potatoes, boiled meats and nutritious fermented porridge are no longer on their menus. To have mukimo, a mash of boiled greens, legumes, potatoes, bananas, and green maize one has to make a special order.

This culinary shift has had adverse effects on people's digestive systems in the villages, resulting in various diseases.

Crohns, an inflammation of both the large and small intestines, is common in western societies and among people living on fast foods. Evidence points to it being related to eating of, and living on, fast foods and a diet of refined food with fewer vegetables. Its exact cause is unknown and there's no effective treatment. It is chronic and characterised by intermittent painful diarrhoea, which resists healing and can end up in surgery.

This condition improves when one changes diet to foods rich in fibre, both soluble and insoluble, found in green leafy vegetables, fruits and tubers. In 1992, *Persson et al* reported an improvement of this inflammatory bowel disease by a change in eating habits to a fibre-rich diet.

Poly-unsaturated fats in the diet—like those found in fish—may improve the intestinal function in patients with Crohns disease as observed by *French*



MA et al in 1997. Also fish oil supplements have been shown to reduce the frequency of attacks from this condition.

Deficiency of vitamin B, especially folic acid, is common in patients with this condition particularly if medications like antibiotics, which disturb the normal gastro-intestinal flora, are given. This condition, therefore, warrants sufferers to increase their consumption of vitamin B-rich foods.

Iron deficiency is common sometimes due to blood loss from intestinal bleeding that accompany this condition and also due to poor absorption of the mineral. Legumes, tomatoes and passion fruits are good sources of iron and they need to be included in the diet of those suffering from Crohns.

So-called modern foods are refined and poor in roughage. A study in

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Karolniska Institute in Stockholm, Sweden, showed that those on sugary foods are three times likely to get the disease compared to those on less than 15gms of sugar a day.

Any food likely to cause intestinal allergy should be avoided and so should substances that irritate the bowels and those difficult to digest for sensitive individuals. For instance, consider a product like yeast. Some people are sensitive to this food ingredient and they should avoid bread and beer as their consumption may precipitate the condition or worsen it.

Wheat contains products like gluten, which when isolated from the endosperm and bran, can produce intolerance in certain individuals.

Those intolerant to this component of wheat may find eating its products, especially when refined, being a cause of the abdominal discomfort. Eating whole grain wheat helps as the bran and germ contain fibre and the much needed vitamins B, niacin, foliates and vitamin E.

Cabbage, which has mild laxative and regulating effects on the stomach transit time because of its cellulose component, has been found to have beneficial effects on chronic constipation and diarrhoea. In an article published in 1998 in Madrid, experiments carried out in Stanford University demonstrated the beneficial effects of cabbage on gastric and duodenal ulcers: it lessens the treatment time of those on anti-ulcer medications.