

THINK BEFORE YOU CHEW

By Vidya Iyengar, Bangalore Mirror Bureau | Oct 30, 2015, 04.00 AM IST



These documentaries on food and health aim to make you more watchful of what you put into your mouth, and raise awareness on the increasing incidence of lifestyle diseases

More money, more disease. That seems to be true of urban India today, which finds itself at the hospital, paying to pop pills for newer diseases or existing ones that now seem omnipresent - such as hypertension and diabetes. While the blame is often placed on junk food and unhealthy living, Sanctuary for Health and Reconnection to Animals and Nature (SHARAN), a non-profit organisation with the goal of spreading awareness about holistic health and an ecologically sustainable compassionate lifestyle, is going one step further. Instead of lecturing you, they have tied up with Khula Manch - a platform to discuss critical, sensitive, controversial issues - to show you, by screening health-based documentaries.

The philosophy of SHARAN and its core members is simply, to understand what it means to really be healthy. "We believe that all life on the planet is interconnected. By reconnecting we can heal ourselves and the earth," says Anubha Kothari, health coach from Bengaluru at SHARAN. Through the 8 documentaries which will be screened every Tuesday at NUMA (formerly known as Cobalt on Church Street) and Suchitra Film Society in Banashankari, the team hopes to spread awareness on the benefits of "living close to nature". "We want people to understand that what is good for us is also good for the environment," she explains. That, they believe, is the cure to diseases such as asthma, BP, obesity and more. "We recommend only plant-based whole food and some lifestyle changes. With the result that within a month a person who has been told that he will require life-long medication for diabetes or hypertension will be off it," Kothari says.

She speaks from experience. After 6-8 months of struggling with asthma, it took Kothari just a month to find relief, after she approached SHARAN and began following their methods, in 2013. That's when she decided to coach others in the city, through cooking workshops, talks, and now through the film screenings. "We need to be mindful of what we eat. Over the years, the food has changed, and pesticide levels have increased, which is causing illness," she believes.

The rising consumption of animal food - high in cholesterol - is also a factor, she points out. And the films will highlight that. There's *Super Size Me*, a 2004 American documentary film directed by and starring Morgan Spurlock, an independent filmmaker, which follows him from February 1 to March 2, 2003, during which he ate food only from McDonald's - super sized every time the server asked if he wanted it that way. The film documents this lifestyle's drastic effect on Spurlock's physical and psychological well-being, and explores the fast food industry's corporate influence, including how it encourages poor nutrition for its own profit.

King Corn is a feature documentary about Ian Cheney and Curtis Ellis, best friends from college who move to the heartland to learn where their food comes from. With the help of friendly neighbours, genetically-modified seeds, and powerful herbicides, they plant and grow a bumper crop of America's most-productive, most-subsidised grain on one acre of soil. But when they try to follow their pile of corn into the food system, they find troubling questions about how we eat and how we farm.

Advocating a return to local fodder such as raagi and millets, she speaks of how even the lower income group's switch to polished grains has led to an increased incidence of lifestyle diseases among their population. Mayank Rungta, co-founder of Khula Manch, which has raised funds for the screening rights of the films, agrees. "Polished grains are not half as nutritional as its unpolished counterparts," he says. Organic food too is preferable. But many assume that it will be expensive. Kothari assures that is not the case. "Eventually, the long-term cost works out to the same

because you reduce the expenditure on medication," she explains.

The films, she hopes, will help people become more mindful of what they put into their mouth.

Rungta adds, "The advertising industry is not going to tell us about the hazards of processed food. We hope to bring about a small change by educating people." After all, you are what you eat.

The documentaries are being screened from 3rd November 2015 at NUMA, Church Street and Suchitra Film Society

GALLERIES



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