

Why are Indians so fat and sick?



Reyna before she became a vegan



Reyna after she tried Sharan's 21 day vegan health holiday

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Come summer vacations and the impending trip to India means a thorough scan of your baggage at the airport and an even more careful study of your contours at the arrival gates. "Oh! You have put on so much weight," is the first greeting received. Who needs a weighing scale after all, I wonder. Living in Dubai, one milestone that everyone reaches in a year is the Dubai stone, or in simple terms the extra 10 kgs added to your waistline. But one glance around any Indian city and we are assured that we are certainly not alone.

Yes, India has the third-highest number of obese and overweight people (11 percent of adolescents, and 20 percent of all adults) after US and China. One in every five Indian men and women is either obese or overweight.

No more a symbol of opulence and prosperity, but a sad example of what leading a sedentary lifestyle and having highly processed food can do to one's body when simple chores become a task, and tasks become akin to an endurance test; obesity is not only a social stigma but a severe jolt to one's self esteem. And in the long run an open invitation to diseases like high blood

pressure, diabetes, cancers, joint problems, sleep apnea to name a few.

Ironically, though smoking has received a lot of attention for the dangers it poses to public health, more and more people today are dying today of obesity related diseases.

The rush is quite evident as more and more people desperately try different drugs, pay hefty amounts to slimming centers or opt for surgical procedures to lose weight.

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Before India becomes the hub for all the pharmaceutical giants, bariatric surgeons, and weight reducing agencies that promise a "quick fix," its high time we sit back and think, "where have we gone wrong? Why are we so sick?"

"They are not exercising at all. The most important thing is that Indians are brought up with this idea of

Dairy, Dairy and more Dairy. Milk means curd, butter, paneer, cheese, cream, ice cream, buttermilk etc. Milk is a food for a calf to grow to full size in 18 months and contains powerful growth hormones. And if one continues to take it every single day it is difficult to get over it. Moreover, many Indians are vegetarians, but milk products are part of every single part of the meal. In addition, Indians put a lot of oil in the food and there is so much fat, but no usage of the fat," says Dr Nandita Shah, founder of Sharan, (Sanctuary for Health and Reconnection to Animals and Nature) a non-profit organisation with the goal of spreading awareness about holistic health and an ecologically sustainable compassionate lifestyle. "The fat you eat, is the fat you wear," is how she puts it.

Having started Sharan nearly a decade back, Dr Shah and her team, is on a mission to make India diabetes free. From giving cooking demos, conducting health and disease reversal workshops, to running a 21-day residential programme in Gokarna, she vociferously advocates a plant based diet for a healthy life and has immense faith in the healing power of the body. The objective being to help people understand what the natural diet for the human species is. Going vegan is the key to good health, or should one say the only key. It lists excess fat (animal products and refined plant fats), excess protein, lack of fibre and acidic food as the four main nutritional cause of diseases.

"Animals can cure themselves, why cant we?" demands Dr Shah.

And the answer she gives is, "We are disconnected." Over the years our relationship with food has changed drastically and it is imperative to understand what food exactly is? "Food is a fuel and we need to use the right fuel. But ironically most often we put the best fuel in our cars, but not in our bodies. We are the only species that systematically makes our food less nutritious," she says.

We eat for entertainment, for company, to kill



Dr. Jerold's microgreen garden at home



Dr Nandita Shah demonstrates some of her tasty vegan cooking

boredom etc. And while eating we text, we type, we watch TV, and now even toddlers eat their food with l pads attached to their prams. Not being mindful of what we shovel into our mouths too contributes to one overeating and eventually putting on weight. Sadly, this practice begins quite early. "Children eat slow, they chew, they don't get the connection when asked to eat fast. Now, when we see good food, anytime we can start eating. The bottom-line is we have to be conscious and aware of so many things," adds Dr. Shah.

"After weaning, humans don't need any milk or milk based product," contends Dr Shah. But we continue to rewrite rules to suit our interests, our pallets and our pockets. Little do we know that all of these could be substituted with healthier plant based products.

In his book, Eat to Live, Dr Joel Fuhrman explains that appetite is not controlled by the weight of the food but by fibre, nutrient density and caloric density and green vegetables is so incredibly low in calories and rich in nutrients and fibre that the more of them one eats, the more weight you lose.

These Nine principles extracted from Sharan's Healthy Living booklet can transition you to a healthy diet from:

1. Refined grain to Whole grain.
2. Refined sweeteners (eg Sugar) to unrefined sweeteners (jaggery, palm sugar and fruit juice) and whole sweeteners (eg, dates, raisins, other dried fruits)
3. Juices to whole fruits and vegetables and smoothies (on an empty stomach)
4. Peeled fruit and vegetables to unpeeled and whole fruit and vegetables.
5. Extracted fats (eg oil and butter) to whole fats like nuts and seeds.
6. Frying and over cooking to poaching, blanching, and dry roasting.



Former hardcore meat eater Dr. Jerrold Paulraj and family: "In 8 – 12 days growth, microgreens have 4 – 40 fold more nutrition than seeds, sprouts and fully grown vegetables."

7. Cooked food to 50 per cent fresh and raw food.
8. Pesticide and chemical laden to organic food.
9. Animal based products to plant based food.

Sharan has positively impacted the lives of over 20,000 people in India and abroad and some are even working as its Lifestyle Advisors.

Reyna is one of them. "I always kept wondering is it possible to live a life without medication. I realized it was, after attending a movie cum lunch session organized by Sharan in Mumbai. Little did I know my life was to change when I met Dr. Nandita Shah. She made a lot of sense. Plus the food was nutritious and delicious." Today Reyna has lost 10 kgs in a span of about 10 months. "People say I look like a college girl. I am 40 and a mother of a thirteen year old," she beams. Suffering from a chronic acidity problem, she saw it disappear after shifting to a whole plant based diet. Seeing the results she encouraged her parents to go for Sharan's 21 day health holiday in Gokarna. "They came back reversing their Diabetes and Blood pressure! Imagine, medications of 10 years, stopped," she says excitedly.

Sharing the same level of excitement is Dr Saurabh Chaudhuri. "I lost 16 kgs (from 108 to 92) and my waist reduced 6 inches (from 48 to 42)in 2.5 months from March 22 to June 12 without any additional exercise," he says.

He feels with the present lifestyle he is now able to strike a better relationship with food. "The food doesn't kill me instead it's healing me. Earlier I used to take medicines as food, now am taking food as medicines," he says. With his BP, Sugar and cholesterol under control he not only feels lighter and energetic, but, feels more positive that he can heal himself through food."

"Our body is always working to heal itself. All we

have to do is get out of the way," says Dr Shah.

Realizing this mantra at the nick of time was this Sharan workshop attendee Anjali Tejani. Suffering from piles 3rd stage she adopted a vegan lifestyle as the last resort before getting it operated. "I used to lie down for four hours as there used to be no energy in me to work after attending the nature's call, which was again a task in itself. As I recovered, all those issues disappeared and I got my vitality back," she says confidently. Today she is slimmer, has a glowing skin and is more sprightly.

Grappling with problems of obesity, hypothyroidism, asthma and "well known" for her sickness in the neighborhood, the wake up call for Swati Pokale was when her mother was diagnosed with cancer. Both shifted to a vegan lifestyle and today feel grateful to Dr Shah, for the positive changes in their health. "After changing my lifestyle my near and dear ones were very much surprised. Apart from this even being a cancer patient my mother's face was glowing. She was having acne marks on her face for the last 10 years which disappeared in these 4 months. She enjoys good health now," she says.

For Dr Jerold Paulraj, the benefits of a plant based diet outweigh every other diet under the sun. His journey from being a hardcore meat eater to a vegan and now a raw foodie, began when his mother was diagnosed with fungated breast cancer at the terminal stage and the doctors had given her just 2 to 3 months to live. In three months despite her initial aversion to vegan food, the fungated breast healed completely leaving no mark in her body. "From being bedridden, she resumed her work as a teacher and passed away two years after the doctors opinion of two months to live." After this "wonderful experience," he made it a point never to eat animal food again.

While buying organic food poses a problem to many, especially considering the exorbitant prices they are sold at, Jerold found a novel way. He grows around 40 different varieties of microgreens and adds them to all his meals. "Research has proven that in its 8 – 12 days growth, microgreens have 4 – 40 fold more nutrition than what can be seen in seeds, sprouts and a fully grown vegetable," he says.

A few years back when the doctors asked his wife to terminate her pregnancy stating it as an abnormal one, he went ahead. "She almost avoided all the meat and dairy products and consumed more plant based food. We did no scan after five months. At the end, the results we had impressed us more than what we expected. After having a C- section for her first pregnancy, she had a normal delivery and the baby had no signs of abnormalities," he points out. ■

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