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# GRAHAK SATHI

## A Guide to Healthier Food Choices



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**CERC**  
Since 1978

Making healthy food choices can feel difficult and complicated, especially with so many processed and packaged options available. But small changes in daily eating habits can make a big difference.

This e-book **“A Guide to Healthier Food Choices”** by **Grahak Sathi** aims to help consumers understand what to watch out for and how to make better food choices. It gives simple, useful tips to avoid common food mistakes and eat healthy. You do not need to spend more, just be more aware.



***Eat smart, stay healthy!***

# Understanding Processed Foods and Ultra Processed Foods

- **Processed Foods** - Foods normally known as Processed Foods undergo processing and modification to an extent that it substantially changes the nutritional content of the food.
- **Ultra Processed Foods (UPFs)** - These are extensively industrially processed food products that are typically high in calories, low in fibre and nutrients. Quite often they are devoid of fibre and micronutrients too. UPFs include ready-to-eat foods, sugary drinks, ice creams, cookies, breakfast cereals, cake mixes, cold cut meats, instant noodles and soups, frozen meals, etc., which are best avoided.
- Most processed foods and UPFs are usually high in fat, sugar, and salt - called High Fat Sugar and Salt (HFSS) foods.
- They contain many additives like preservatives, sweeteners, and flavorings to enhance taste, appearance, and shelf life.
- They are widely consumed because of their taste and palatability, low cost, and easy availability.
- Regular consumption of Ultra Processed Foods can lead to obesity, heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. They also hasten the aging process.



## Tips to Adopt Healthy Eating

- Always read food labels to avoid consuming highly processed foods which are High in Fat, Sugar and Salt.
- Choose fresh and minimally processed foods: whole grains such as cereals, millets, pulses and fresh vegetables, fruits, nuts and seeds.
- Avoid deep fried, fatty, sugary and salty foods and bakery products.
- It is best to eat home-cooked meals and snacks which are prepared using fresh and good quality ingredients

*A little extra effort can go a long way towards good health!*

## Be Cautious When You Consume High Fat, Sugar & Salt (HFSS) Foods

- HFSS foods are those foods which are prepared with excessive oil/fat, added sugar, and salt.
- They are high in calories but low in essential nutrients like vitamins, minerals, and fibre.
- Regular consumption of HFSS foods can lead to overweight and obesity, increase the risk of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like diabetes, hypertension etc., and contribute to nutrient deficiencies.
- Limit visible oils/fats to less than 30g perday (6 teaspoons). Visible fats mean the oils/fats that are used in cooking or added later. Avoid deep-fried foods like samosas, french fries, etc.
- It is advisable to limit intake of saturated fats to less than 10g perday (2 teaspoons). Coconut oil, palm oil, ghee, butter, cheese, red meat are high in Saturated fats.
- Keep added sugar to less than 25g perday (5 teaspoons). Choose naturally sweet foods like fruits over sugary snacks and beverages.
- Cut down on salt intake to less than 5g perday (1 teaspoon). Avoid processed foods as they are usually high in salt, like chips, pickles and sauces.
- Always read food labels to identify hidden fats, sugars, and salts in packaged food items.
- Even home cooked food can be unhealthy if prepared with high fat and high salt or sugar.



***Avoid adding sugar while cooking and cook with minimal oils and salt for a healthier diet!***

## Quick Tips to Stay Hydrated with Healthy Drink Choices

- Avoid dehydration. Drink adequate water to meet the daily fluid requirements.
- Consume homemade cool drinks like butter milk, nimbu paani, aam panna, jaljeera, etc. as beverages in hot weather. Avoid synthetic soft drinks and carbonated beverages.
- Commercially available drinks contain additives like colouring agents, preservatives, excessive sugar or sweeteners and flavours which are harmful to health. Avoid consuming such drinks.
- Opt for freshly made juice from fresh fruits instead of packaged fruit juices as these can be high in sugar. However, it is best to eat the whole fruit instead of juicing it for better fibre content.
- Avoid alcoholic beverages.



***50-70% of your body weight is water. Hydrate to maintain the balance!***

# Swap High Calorie foods with Healthier foods

## Swap these HFSS foods

## With these Healthier foods

Deep fried snacks which are high in oil/fat



Low-calorie salads and sprouts from whole grains and vegetables rich in nutrients. Nuts and seeds which have healthy fats

Food containing highly refined ingredients like maida, high fat and high sugar



Traditional sweets and snacks (having relatively lower fat and sugar) which are made from whole grains, millets, nuts and seeds

Sugar sweetened carbonated and non-carbonated beverages, health drinks and energy drinks



Natural drinks like tender coconut water, buttermilk, fresh lemon juice, chia seeds soaked in lemon juice, etc. Also good to have a whole fruit instead of fruit juice.

Commercial jams, ketchups, sauces, and dips



Fresh homemade chutneys and dips

*Simple swaps help you eat healthy without compromising on taste and satisfaction!*

## Choose Protein Rich Foods Instead of Protein Powders



- Protein-rich foods are essential for building and repairing tissues, supporting immune function, and maintaining muscle mass.
- Animal protein sources include meat, poultry, fish, eggs, and milk/milk products like paneer. Plant-based sources are pulses, nuts, and seeds.
- Enhance protein quality by combining cereals with pulses like in dal or rajma chawal or khichdi to provide all essential amino acids.
- It is advisable to include protein-rich whole foods in your diet instead of protein supplements like powders and shakes.
- Normally protein powders are made from eggs, dairy milk or whey. Plant based protein powders are made from soybeans, peas, and rice.
- They often contain added sugars, sweeteners, and artificial flavourings.
- Prolonged and excessive intake of protein supplements is associated with risk of bone mineral loss and kidney damage.
- Whey protein may increase the risk of non-communicable diseases (NCDs).
- You can fulfil your protein requirements through a well-selected diet, prioritizing whole foods over supplements for optimal health and well-being.

***Choose wisely from everyday foods to fulfil your protein requirements!***

## Eat Smart While You Travel

- Choose food carefully while traveling. Avoid eating at places with poor hygiene.
- Stick to foods that your stomach is used to. Trying unfamiliar food while travelling may upset your metabolism, leading to digestive issues.
- Only drink bottled or boiled water. Avoid ice if you are unsure of the source.
- Choose hot and freshly cooked meals like dosa, utthappam, paratha, omelette, boiled egg etc.
- Avoid foods like raw salads, cut fruits, curd, uncooked vegetables etc. from open stalls.
- Preferably eat fruits you can peel yourself, like bananas or oranges.
- Avoid milk-based drinks like milkshakes and lassi, especially during summer as they tend to spoil faster.
- Be cautious with meat dishes, especially if you are unsure of the source.
- Avoid fried snacks, if the oil looks reused or dirty.



***As far as possible, carry your own food, snacks, water, and medicines to avoid any health issues!***

## About CERC

Consumer Rights protection and justice for consumers have been the focus of Consumer Education and Research Centre (CERC) since its inception in 1978. CERC is India's only Consumer Rights Organisation that provides 360° services to the consumer in terms of Education, Empowerment and Protection.

A broad range of activities are undertaken in the organization – grievance redressal through mediation and litigation, consumer education and awareness building through various publications and outreach activities, testing and analysis of consumer products in our in-house product testing laboratories, advocacy for laws and regulations that better protect consumers, as well as a number of projects executed in various areas pertinent to consumer protection and empowerment. Promoting environmental awareness, energy conservation and sustainable consumption are also major activity areas in CERC.

**Grahak Sathi** - your weekly e-magazine is available free in English, Hindi, Gujarati, Malayalam, Marathi, Tamil and Bengali. If you want to receive a free copy, write to us at [grahaksathi@cercindia.org](mailto:grahaksathi@cercindia.org).

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