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Popular Article

The Nutritional Marvel: Why Fish Should Be on Your Plate

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Abstract

This article explores the nutritional importance of fish in Indian cuisine, addressing cultural challenges that hinder its consumption in certain regions. Despite being a nutrient-rich source, fish faces underrepresentation on Indian plates. The article navigates through scientific evidence supporting its health benefits, emphasizing cardiovascular health, mental well-being, depression prevention, and vision protection. Addressing cultural barriers, the article suggests strategies for making fish more inclusive, respecting regional sensitivities. It advocates for educational initiatives, affordability measures, and culinary exploration to elevate fish's status in Indian households. The article concludes by envisioning fish not just as a food item but as a nutritional mosaic that, if incorporated thoughtfully, can unlock a wealth of health benefits in every Indian plate.

Keywords: Fish, Nutrient, Health, Indian Cuisine, Cultural Beliefs, Omega-3 Fatty Acids, Regional Diets, Culinary Diversity.

Introduction

In the vast tapestry of Indian cuisine, where aromatic spices dance in traditional curries and tandoori delights, one protein often takes a backseat – fish. While chicken and mutton dominate the Indian palate, the nutritional marvels of fish, with its abundant proteins, essential lipids, and a trove of vitamins and minerals, deserve a more central role. This journey through the aquatic wonders explores why fish should swim to the forefront of Indian plates, not just for its gastronomic appeal but for its invaluable health benefits.

- **The Rich Nutrient Mix in Fish:** Fish, whether netted from bustling coastal markets or sourced from the freshwater bounty of rivers, stands as a nutritional powerhouse. Offering a harmonious blend of proteins, lipids, ash, and a touch of vitamins and minerals, fish proves



to be a versatile and nourishing food source. Its nutrient mix complements the diverse dietary needs of the Indian population, making it a valuable addition to daily meals.

- **Proteins -The Pillars of Health:** In a country with diverse dietary options, fish stands out as a vital protein source. Rich in essential amino acids crucial for muscle growth, immune function, and overall health, fish protein offers around 20 different amino acids, including all nine essentials. Notably, fish protein boasts high bioavailability and digestibility, ensuring efficient absorption by the body. This makes fish an excellent choice for meeting daily protein needs and is particularly beneficial for individuals with specific dietary requirements.
- **Fatty Acids - A Heart-Healthy Choice:** The lipids in fish, particularly omega-3 fatty acids like EPA and DHA, usher in a myriad of benefits. From promoting cardiovascular health to ensuring optimal brain function, the inclusion of fish in the Indian diet becomes a proactive step towards preventing diseases that plague modern lifestyles. Highlighting the heart-healthy aspects of fish can encourage more individuals to embrace it as a dietary staple.
- **Minerals and Vitamins - Micronutrient Richness:** Fish introduces a spectrum of minerals—calcium, iodine, selenium, zinc, iron, phosphorus, and potassium—often lacking in traditional Indian diets. Moreover, it boasts vitamins A, D, and various B-group vitamins, enhancing the overall nutritional content and contributing to a well-rounded diet. These micronutrients play a crucial role in supporting various bodily functions, from bone health to immune system regulation.

Health Boost for India: Scientific Evidence

Beyond its nutritional richness, regular fish consumption has been linked to a reduced risk of heart diseases, strokes, and mental decline. In a country where lifestyle-related diseases are on the rise, the health benefits of fish could offer a significant boost. Understanding the scientific evidence behind these health benefits provides a compelling case for incorporating fish into daily meals.

Scientific Evidence on Fish and Health

- **Cardiovascular Health:** Numerous studies have underscored the positive impact of fish consumption on heart health. The omega-3 fatty acids found in fatty fish have been associated with a lower risk of heart attacks and strokes. Research indicates that regular fish intake can contribute to a 15% lower risk of heart disease, making it a valuable addition to India's battle against cardiovascular ailments.



- **Mental Well-being:** As India faces growing challenges related to mental health, the significance of fish in bolstering brain health becomes evident. Research indicates that communities with greater fish consumption exhibit slower rates of mental decline. Consuming fish has been linked to augmented brain matter in regions linked to memory and emotion, providing a potential safeguard against age-related cognitive decline.
- **Depression Prevention:** Depression, a prevalent concern in modern society, has been linked to omega-3 fatty acids found abundantly in fish. Research suggests that regular fish consumption can significantly reduce the risk of depression. Furthermore, omega-3 fatty acids have been shown to enhance the effectiveness of antidepressant medications, providing a holistic approach to mental well-being.
- **Vision Protection:** Age-related macular degeneration (AMD), a leading cause of vision impairment, sees a reduced risk with increased fish consumption. Studies indicate a substantial decrease in AMD risk, emphasizing the potential of fish in preserving vision, particularly in the aging population.

Fish on the Indian Plate: A Cultural Challenge

Despite its nutritional prowess, fish faces hurdles in making it to every Indian plate. Cultural beliefs, especially in certain regions, pose a challenge. In parts of India, particularly influenced by vegetarianism due to religious or cultural reasons, fish may be overlooked despite its nutritional richness.

Bridging the Cultural Gap

To make fish more inclusive in the Indian diet, it is crucial to:

- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Understanding and respecting cultural beliefs is paramount. Educational campaigns can focus on highlighting how fish can complement traditional vegetarian diets without conflicting with cultural values.
- **Regional Variations:** Recognizing the diverse culinary preferences across India and promoting regional fish delicacies can make fish more appealing and culturally relevant.

Fish in the Global and Indian Context

On a global scale, fish provides essential animal protein to about 7.8 billion people, constituting almost 20.2 kg of their average per capita intake (FAO, 2022). However, in India, per capita fish consumption is lower (6.31 kg) than the global average, reflecting the need for concerted efforts to elevate its status in Indian households (GoI, 2022).



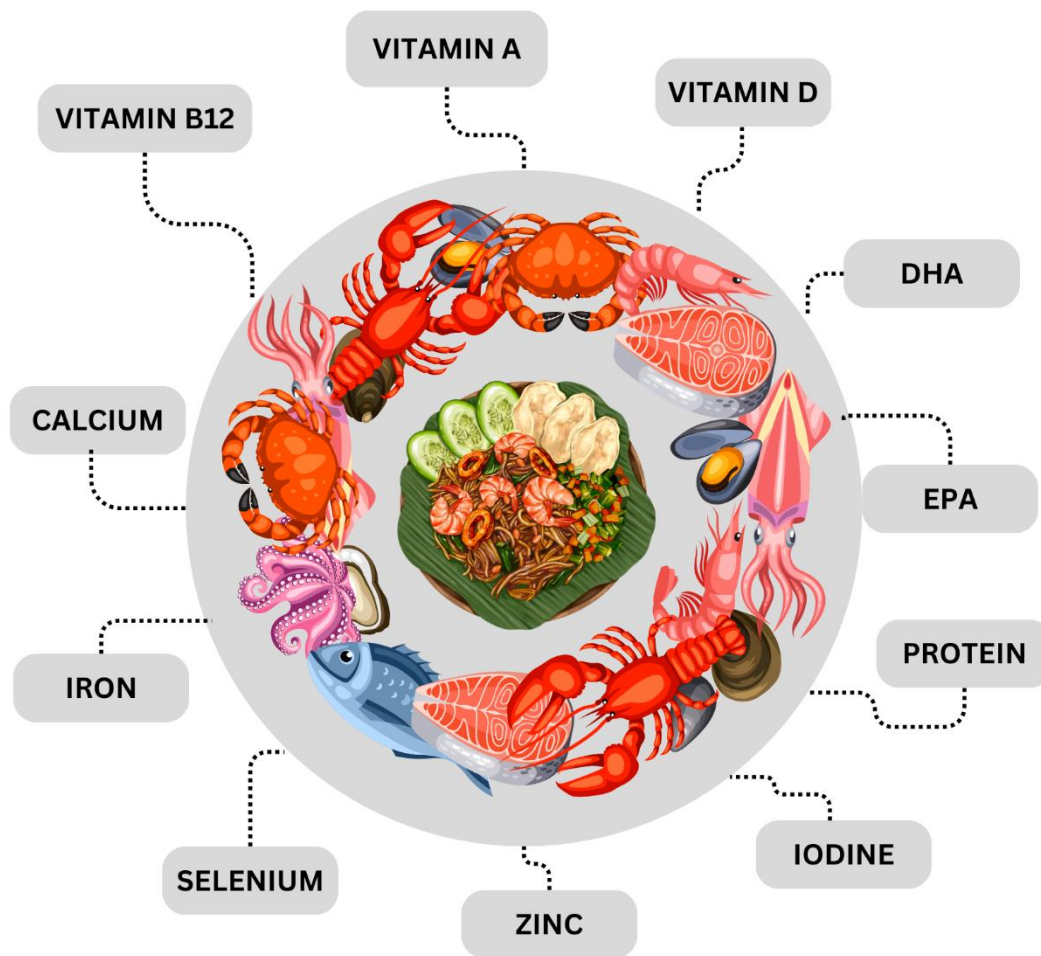


Fig. Nutritional quality of fish food

Culinary Delight with a Nutritional Punch

Efforts to incorporate fish into Indian diets should focus on:

- **Educational Initiatives:** Launching campaigns that emphasize the nutritional value of fish can alter perceptions and encourage its inclusion.
- **Affordability Measures:** Addressing economic barriers through subsidies or local aquaculture initiatives can make fish more accessible to diverse socio-economic strata.
- **Culinary Exploration:** Celebrating the rich diversity of Indian cuisine by showcasing delicious ways to prepare fish can turn it into a culinary delight for all.

Fish and the Indian Culinary Tapestry

In the myriad of Indian flavors, fish has its own unique place. From Gujarat to Bengal, and Kashmir to Kerala, fish plays a starring role from the Himalayas to the Indian Ocean.

However, cultural beliefs in certain parts of India can impede its widespread acceptance. For instance, in many traditional Hindu households, especially during religious festivals and rituals, the consumption of fish may be restricted. Understanding these cultural nuances is essential in promoting fish consumption.

Conclusion: Fish, a Nutritional Mosaic for India

In conclusion, fish is not merely a food item; it is a nutritional mosaic that can enrich the health of a nation. In India, where cultural beliefs often influence dietary choices, bridging the gap between tradition and nutrition is crucial. By recognizing the untapped potential of fish and incorporating it into the cultural narrative, India can unlock a wealth of health benefits and turn fish into a celebrated part of every plate. Embracing fish as a culinary delight with a nutritional punch ensures that it takes its deserved place on every Indian plate, contributing not just to gastronomic satisfaction but also to the overall well-being of the nation.

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