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Perceptions on a healthy diet among general public in Puttalam District, Sri Lanka

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Background: Nutrition plays a fundamental role in prevention, management and treatment of diseases. A healthy diet provides nutrients to maintain or improve overall health. Perceptions influence the nutritional status. Despite numerous dietary recommendations, people are more attracted to a rapidly westernizing diet which is the leading cause of various diseases.

Objective: To assess the perceptions on a healthy diet among the general public.

Method: Ethical clearance was obtained from the International Institute of Health Sciences. A descriptive, cross-sectional study was conducted among a convenient public sample of 402 individuals between 20-59 years. Data was collected through a validated questionnaire. The self-administered questionnaire was circulated via social media platforms and was analyzed using the SPSS software.

Results: Nearly half of the respondents (46.4%) were aged between 20-29 years and all were educated above advanced level. The majority (93.6%) believed that nutrition is important for a healthy life. Overall, 62.9% described their appetite to be good. However, 93.6% are willing to make changes in their current dietary habits, out of which the majority (62.9%) wished to eat more fruits and vegetables. Many (71.2%) stated that their appetite depends on the hunger which they have at the time of meals. Most of the participants (83.5%) had never received dietary advice from a medical practitioner. Out of the sample, 16.1% were concerned about their body weight and tried to gain or lose weight. Only 43.4% chose dietary modifications to gain or lose weight. Smell or taste of food (44.9%), and weight maintenance (29.6%) were the main reasons for avoiding food.

Conclusion: The perceptions on a healthy diet among the public is satisfactory. Healthcare providers must educate and guide the public on maintaining their health through the diet.