Meal Skipping Pattern- A Rising Trend Among Youngsters

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ABSTRACT

Youngsters especially college students of today's world skips meals regularly due to lack of time or due to many other reasons. But the ill effects of meal skipping starts immediately and continue during adulthood also. Thus this is high time to educate them regarding the importance of consumption all three meals. The purpose of the present study is to evaluate the meal skipping pattern of college girls. The study surveyed 500 college going girls from Chennai. A pre tested Interview schedule was used to collect information regarding meal skipping pattern of the girls and the obtained information was subjected to analysis and interpretation. About one-third of the subjects skipped either of the meal. Among them breakfast was skipped by the majority. About 22% skipped breakfast daily, among them 40% consumed their first food of the day during lunch and about 66% reported that they had reduced concentration. About 38% reported that they do not like to carry lunch box to college. About 27% reported dieting as the reason for skipping dinner. Since there is a rise in trend for skipping meals the importance of consumption of all the three meals in a day should be educated to the students to prevent both nutrient deficiencies as well as non-communicable diseases.

Key words: Meal skipping, breakfast, brain food, first food

INTRODUCTION

"Meal skipping is the omission or lack of consumption of one or more of the traditional main meals (breakfast, lunch or dinner) throughout the day". The regular omission of meals, particularly the breakfast meal, has been associated with poorer diet quality, lower intakes of total energy, vitamins and minerals, increased risk of central adiposity, markers of insulin resistance, and cardio metabolic risk factors [1]. Studies show that many young adults have the habits

of skipping meals especially breakfast. Increased snacking, lunch skipping, a sedentary lifestyle and obesity have been found to be more common among those who skip breakfast than the breakfast eater. Breakfast skipping has also been found to be associated with dysmenorrhea among the females. Establishment of a healthy lifestyle behaviour can have a long lasting impact on their health and the health of their future family. It is important that these young adults are educated and reinforced in healthy eating behaviour and are able to select a healthy choice of food in the future [2]. A recent Chennai-based study conducted among college students revealed that most of the college students consumed only two meals per day and intake of nutritional food is inadequate [3]. Skipping of meals was followed by 84 percent of the adolescents. Anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa were observed in underweight adolescents with attributes such as weight conscious behavior, eating to escape from worries, habit of induced vomiting predominated their inclination towards the maintenance of body weight [4]. Among the medicos, nearly half of the students did not have regular breakfast, and 11-15% was irregular with their lunch and dinner during weekends [5]. Majority of the students usually skip their meals on regular basis that may disturb the body metabolism and increases the future risk of diabetes. Females are mostly abstemious in their eating habits for maintaining physical beauty that are at a greater risk of poor nutrition [6]. Thus this paper will report the meal skipping pattern of college girls in Chennai.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

(i) Sampling: Adopting stratified sampling and simple random sampling methods, respondents were selected from two Government and one Government aided Arts and Science colleges situated in North Chennai area.

(ii) Sample Size: This study was conducted among 500 female students.

(iii) Inclusion Criteria

☐ **Consent**: Willingness of the participants to participate in the undertaken study was confirmed.

☐ **Age**: Participants aged between 19-22 years were selected.

☐ **Gender**: female participants

☐ **Permission:** Permission was obtained from the concerned authorities of the institution

☐ **Stream:** Government and Government aided Arts and Science College students were selected

(iv) Exclusion Criteria:

☐ Participants with any other disease complication were excluded.

☐ Pregnant and lactating women were excluded

☐ Participants taking steroids or immune suppressants were excluded from the study.

☐ Male students

☐ Physically challenged students were excluded.

(v) Steps in conducting the study

(a) Ethical clearance

Ethical clearance was obtained from Universal Ethics Committee (UEC) before commencement of the study. UEC reviewed the study methodology, interview form, participant informed consent form, and rendered **'Full Board Approval'** to conduct the study.

(b)Permission from college authorities:

After selecting the colleges for research purpose, permission was obtained from the respective college authorities for conducting the study.

(c) Selection of Participants:

As per the above-mentioned methodology along with inclusion and exclusion criteria, 500 students were randomly selected from North Chennai colleges.

(d) Consent and Orientation:

Since all our study participants were majors (aged 18 years and plus), written consent to participate in the study was got from all of them. The selected participants who have consented to be a part of the study were informed about the study and its importance by the researcher so that they would cooperate and make possible in collecting the necessary information for the study.

(e) Collection of Data

After finishing the preliminary procedures including obtaining ethical clearance, permission from college authorities, and consent from selected study participants, data collection was started. Interview schedule was used to collect information. Interview schedule refers to the securing of answers to set of questions contained in the proforma, which is filled either by researcher or by the respondents with the help of investigator [7].

(f) Statistical Analysis:

The obtained details were coded and entered into Microsoft excel. The coded raw data were subjected to statistical analysis using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20.0.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The forthcoming tables discuss regarding the meal skipping pattern, reasons for skipping meals and type meal skipping.

Table-1: Meal skipping pattern and Type of meal skipping

Meal skipping		Total	Percentage
Meal skipping	Yes	194	31.5
	No	306	79.5
	Total	500	100

Type of meal	Breakfast	131	67.5
	Lunch	34	17.5
	Dinner	29	14.9
	Total	194	100

From the findings of the current study, about 31.5% of the participants reported meal skipping and only 79.5% consumed all the three the meals regularly.

In a similar study, about two third of the participants (60.9%) were consuming three meals a day, followed by 29.7% two meals a day. About 4.7% consumed one meal in a day and same percentage consumed four meals in a day [8].

The above table clearly indicated that breakfast is the frequently, and most commonly skipped meal (67.5%) among the study population, followed by lunch skipping by 17.5% of the participants and 14.9% of the participants skipped dinner.

In another study, the most skipped meal among the students was lunch (48%), followed by 32.6% skip breakfast and 5.33% skip dinner and only 14% students do not skip their meal [9].

Table-2: Frequency and Reasons for skipping Breakfast

Frequency and Reasons for skipping Breakfast		Total	Percentage
Frequency	Every morning	30	22.9
	1 to 3 days per week	67	51.1
	4 to7 days per week	34	23.6
	Total	131	100

Reasons	No time to eat	29	22.1
	Did not like to eat early	48	36.6
	No appetite	31	23.6
	Getting up late	23	17.5
	Total	131	100

"Breakfast is regarded by many as most important meal of the day" because an adequate food intake at the beginning of the day helps to ensure that nutrients needs by the body for the remainder of the days are likely to be met.

The breakfast skipping frequency is presented in the previous table. About 22.2% subjects skip breakfast daily, 51.1% skip one to three days per week, and 23.6% reported to skip breakfast 4 to 7 days in a week.

The reason for skipping breakfast is reported above. It is clearly understood that 36.6% participants reported that they preferred not to eat early, about 22.1% reported that they have no time to eat breakfast and 23.6% and 17.5% reported lack of appetite and getting up late, these were the reasons for breakfast skipping.

A study conducted by Meenakshi Garg [10] showed that most common reason for skipping breakfast among breakfast skippers was lack of time (30.4%). The other reasons mentioned were loss of appetite (28.3%), no variety of food (23.9%) and non- availability of breakfast (17.4%).

Table-3: First food of the day and concentration

First food and concentration		Female	Total
First food of the day	On the way to college	25	19
	On arriving to college	30	22
	During short break	23	17.5
	During lunch	53	40.4
	Total	131	100
Concentration	Reduced concentration	87	66.4
	Good concentration	44	33.5
	Total	131	100

The above table elicits about the first food of the day for the breakfast skippers. About 19% reported their first meal is on the way to college, 22% and 17.5% reported their first meal on arriving to college and during short breaks respectively. Majority of the participants (40.4%) reported lunch on their first meal. Another study reported that Mid-morning meal was never skipped by breakfast skippers. This is possibly because breakfast skippers tend to become hungrier by mid morning than breakfast non skippers [10].

When concentration of the breakfast skippers was analyzed in the present study, it is clearly revealed that concentration is reduced among 66.4 % of the breakfast skippers and only 33.5% reported to have good concentration.

Table-4: Reasons for skipping Lunch and Dinner

Reasons		Total	Percentage
Reasons for skipping Lunch	No time to eat	5	14.7
	No appetite to Eat	12	35.2
	Food not Palatable	4	11.7
	Do not like to carry lunch box to college	13	38.2
	Total	34	100
Reasons for skipping Dinner	Dieting	8	27.5
	No time to eat	7	24.1
	No appetite to eat	7	24.1
	Food not palatable	7	24.1
	Total	29	100

When the reasons for skipping lunch was analyzed, it was reported that 38.2% 'do not like to carry lunch box', 35.2% and 14.7% confessed 'no appetite to eat' and 'no time to eat' respectively. About 24.1% replied that 'food was not palatable' as the reason to skip lunch. The above table also elicits the reasons for skipping dinner. The present study states that about 24.1% and 24.1% mentioned 'no appetite to eat' and 'no time to eat' respectively. About 27.5% mentioned 'dieting' has the reason and about 24.1% reported 'food not palatable'.

CONCLUSION

The first and foremost improper eating habit is skipping of meals. The importance of consumption of all the three meals in a day should be educated to the students. College going students should be specifically insisted on breakfast consumption which is also called as "Brain Food". College and school authorities along with the parents and Health professionals like Nutritionist should initiate and take steps to educate students on importance of eating habits. Healthy diet pattern includes consumption of balanced diet for all three meals, avoiding processed and junk foods and taking nutritious foods such as fruits, vegetables nuts, low fat dairy products, fish. The importance of consumption of all three meals in a day should be educated to the students. Regular consumption of balance diet for all three meals helps to reduce the deficiency diseases and prevent non-communicable diseases. Thereby we can increase the longevity of an individual and improve their physical, emotional and mental ability and help rise a productive citizen for our country.

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