

Sugar & Health- Workshop (March 2019)

(Summary)

ISMA conducted a 'Sugar & Health- Workshop' on 6th March, 2019 at 'The Park' Hotel, New Delhi, with the primary focus to learn from the experts, educate and spread the awareness amongst masses on healthy consumer attitude viz z viz sugar and to debunk some myths surrounding the sweet stuff.

Renowned speakers (from domestic & International) who are experts in their field were part of this workshop to educate, discuss and engage with the audience on science of sugar consumption and its effect on body. The panelists comprised of Doctors, Prolific Scientist and Nutritionists.

The most common myth associated with sugar is that it causes diabetes and second that it leads to tooth decay or cavities among children, were discussed by the panelists of this workshop.

The workshop started with a presentation from ISMA to set the tone of the day for discussion. It was explained with statistics how the per capita consumption of sugar in India is around 18.5 kilo per person per year which is substantially lower to the developed countries like USA, Germany, Singapore, Russia, New Zealand etc. as also several developing countries like Brazil, Thailand etc. where the per capita consumption was 30 to 47 kilo per person per year.

It was also informed that the per capita consumption growth between 2000 and 2016 has been around 12.5% per year based on a simply arrived average. As compared to that number of patients having diabetes in India grew from 31.7 million to 63 million showing a growth of (6.25%) per year from 2000 to 2016. In other words, it was explained that the growth in number of diabetics in India cannot be because of sugar consumption or increase in sugar consumption because sugar consumption increase per person per year is not even 15 to 20% of the growth in diabetes. There has to be some other reason which needs to be identified by the experts.

ISMA also tried to point out that non-communicable diseases cannot and should not be linked with sugar consumption. For example, dental carries is caused by acid which in turn either formed by the bacteria in the mouth when it interact with the food or by direct intake of acidic food items. Citric fruits, pickles, tomatoes and coffee have low ph value and are acidic and, therefore, can directly attach the enamel. Bu the ph value of sugar is 7 and, therefore, has neutral as sugar. Hence, mere consumption cannot lead to dental carry. The bacteria will have to convert into sugar which can happen only if sugar or any other food item is left in the mouth for a very long period or one consumes sticky food like chips etc which sticks to the teeth to get converted into acid. Proper hygiene and regular brushing and flossing will check tooth decay. It was also raised before the experts to deliberate on whether India should

simply copy what the western countries are adopting without checking the relevance to the Indian condition especially when sugar consumption per capita is much lower than the world average. Also, ISMA wanted to know whether there is any scientific evidence or research which can confirm that sugar is the cause of non-communicable disease or it's a combination of various factors and sugar should not be blamed.

Famous nutritionists, doctors and one scientist from Italy made presentations and expressed their point of view in the workshop. There was a consensus amongst all of them that they confirmed that the non-communicable diseases including diabetes are not caused directly by consumption of sugar. They all accepted that multi-factorial reason which clearly cannot be identified, and a very complicated, which cause non-communicable diseases. One food item or one reason cannot be resulting in these diseases.

There was discussion that our forefathers used to consume large quantities of sugar but did not have similar non-communicable diseases and the instance of diabetes was not as high. Doctors mentioned that the numbers are higher today because of better detection and because of higher life expectancy. But there was a general acceptance that what has changed over the last several decades is the lifestyle and lack of physical activity and exercise. There was a talk that children used to compulsorily play sports or games in school and also there were larger number of parks and sports facilities in neighbourhood or within residential areas which allowed children the chance to either play or do some physical activity. But with the absence of these facilities, the lifestyle has become more sedentary. With advent of technology and availability of gadgets including facilities of remote control, one does not need to even get up for activities or requires much for people for some physical activity or physical movement any more.

What was also very important to note was that there was again unanimity on the fact that one needs to eat right proportion and right quantity of food. Controlling quantity is more essential than actually replacing one food item by another. Eating too much and eating at a wrong time of the day would result in unnecessarily gain extra weight, which in turn, would lead to health issues. In other words, moderation of eating along with physical activity was insisted by all the experts.

People also pointed out that Asians especially South Asians have genetic weakness towards developing diabetes etc. and, therefore, there was suggestion that Indians needs to be more careful as compared to the Europeans or Americans. However, it was pointed out that per capita consumption of sugar in the neighbouring countries in Asia like Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Thailand etc. which are higher than that in India, yet India is said to be diabetic capital of the world. Therefore, blaming the problem of the disease to weak genetic metabolism may not be correct. One important aspect that was discussed was with regard to consumption of artificial sugar. People raised questions to the experts and Doctors whether artificial sugar is at the end of the day is actually a chemical and not a natural product like sugar made from sugarcane

or beet, may do more harm to the body. The experts said that there is yet no scientific evidence to say that consumption of artificial sugar in restricted quantities is harmful, but most of them believe that anything which is produced from natural source or from a plant is certainly and surely better than anything which is grown in the lab or refined too much in the factories.

There was another very important question which was raised with regard to the prescription of WHO stating that not more than 10% of the energy or calories should come from sugar. People raised questions as to from where 10% energy has been arrived and why it is not 8% or 5% or any different number. What brought us to a very important question was that whether replacement of source of calories is the final objective which WHO is actually proposing or there has to be reduction in the caloric intake to control weight gain or obesity.

A speaker mentioned that dissemination of dietary guidelines among the community is very imperative. At the same time it was stated that there no one size fit all formula for sugar causing problems or not depends on many factors like genes, environment, diet and level of physical activity. Creating awareness amongst masses may be the answer.

As per a speaker in this workshop, cases of diabetes are rapidly increasing in India and there is direct link to prove that eating sugar or not eating sugar causes diabetes. There are modifiable risk factors and non-modifiable risk factors one needs to take into account to evaluate the causation of diabetes.

Take Aways from the Sugar & Health- Workshop

- Calorie intake has increased by over 30% in the last 50 years, but a small fraction of this gain can be attributed to sugars;
- There has been 6.25% annual increase in diabetes in the country while per capita sugar consumption has grown by just 1.23% during the period, clearly evident that sugar could not be the sole reason for causing diabetes;
- Too much of misinformation easily available and hence consumers are confused;
- Changes in lifestyle led to overall imbalances in food intake and energy expenditure;
- There is no scientific base or research establishing that sugar is key cause of NCDs (Non-Communicable Diseases);
- A multi-dimensional approach is required to tackle the complex drivers of NCDs rather than an effort to isolate a particular ingredient in a food pyramid.

- More education and awareness required on modifiable factors which lead to overall healthy being.