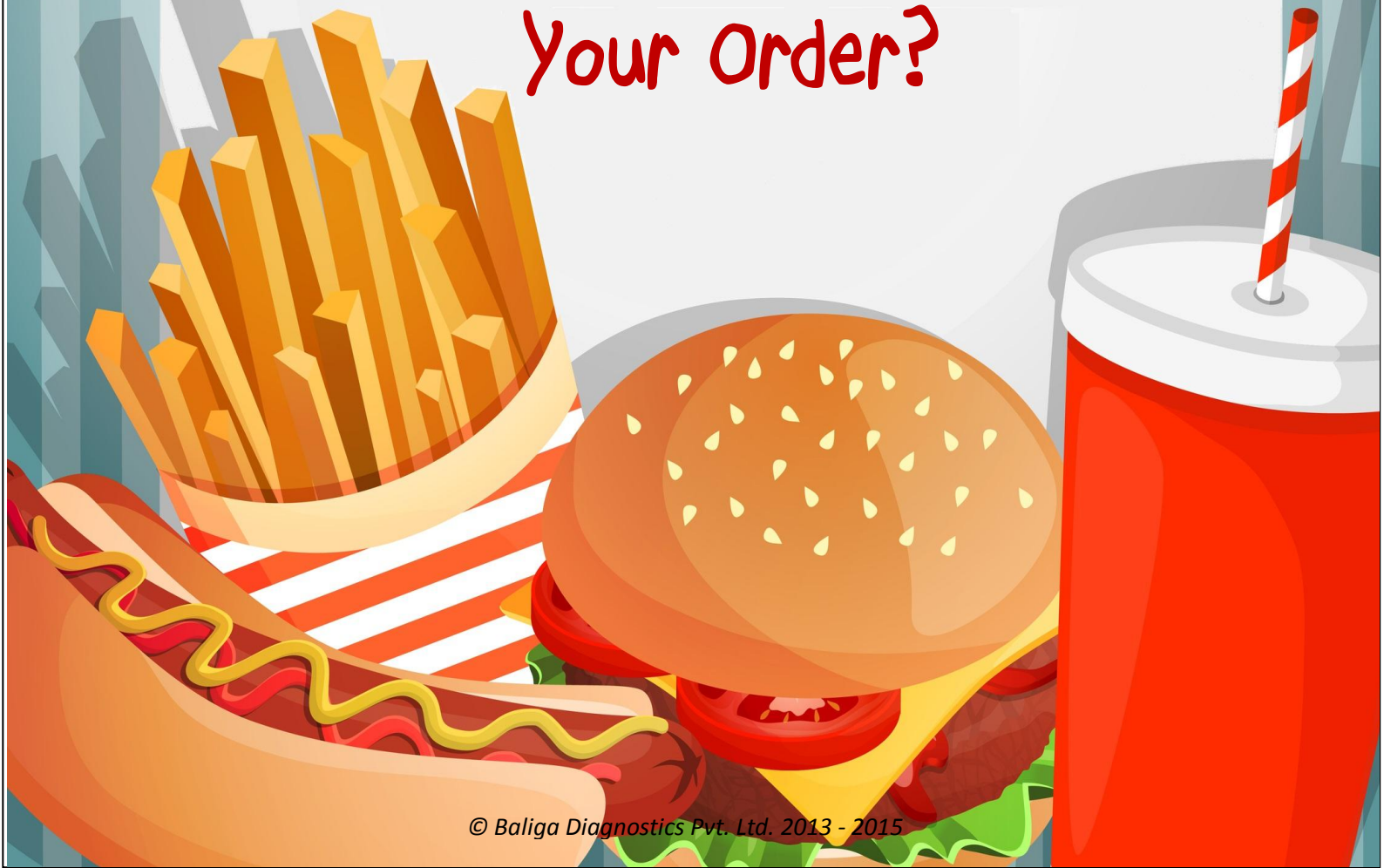




# Sowkhya Magazine™

## Junk Foods

Would You Like A Side  
Of Heart Disease With  
Your Order?



## Hello, and welcome to the February edition of Sowkhya Magazine™.

Another month is upon us, and we continue on our journey of achieving a healthy and balanced life. In this month's serving, we talk about junk food – something that we seem to be indulging in more and more through the recent years. The sheer convenience of it aside, the taste of fries and ketchup and burgers is as enticing as it is satisfying. However, there is a very dark side to junk food, and in this edition, we dive deeper into the health effects that eating these foods brings on us.

Junk foods are not just western foods; it even includes some of our own Indian foods that are currently sold in restaurants, roadside shops and even supermarkets. In fact, junk food consumption is becoming a rising problem due to our busy lifestyle. Eating junk foods regularly can increase the chance of developing obesity – a well recognised cause of heart disease, stroke, diabetes and high blood pressure. Combine this with physical inactivity and you are a sitting duck for a heart attack!

But it is not just the foods that are bad. The drinks are the same, and you may discover some shocking facts about the different kinds of sodas we so enjoy on a hot day. While they may quench our thirst, they can increase body weight over a period of time. There is no doubt that when thirsty, water is the best drink to consume.

As always, in addition to just junk food, we have also included other interesting articles that we hope you will learn from and enjoy. We look forward to your feedback, and trust you will enjoy our serving of knowledge without the fries and drink!



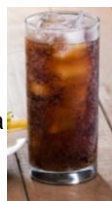
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### Sugary Drinks: Friend or Foe?

For many years now, we have enjoyed a variety of soft drinks – colas, orange, lime, lemon – all undoubtedly satisfying when enjoyed chilled on a hot summer's day. The taste and the joy we experience when drinking a bottle of ice cold soft drinks can sometimes be heavenly.



Many of us enjoy soft drinks once in a while – maybe on a social occasion or sometimes when stopping on the way home at a local bakery. But some may love to consume 2 to 3 drinks of these sugary drinks every day. It becomes an addiction.

#### The problem

Regular consumption of sugary drinks is known to be bad for health. With fast food joints dishing out 'large' drinks at cheap prices, the health problems associated with drinking soft drinks is on the rise.

Let us put it into perspective. People who drink 1 – 2 cans of a sugary drink regularly have a 26% greater risk of developing **type 2 diabetes**. Studies published in reputed medical journals have shown that individuals who consume 1 can (330ml) of a sugary drink a day have a 20% higher risk of developing a **heart attack** compared to those who rarely drink them. This increase is seen in men and women alike.

But it's not just the heart that matters. High intake of soft drinks can increase the chance of developing **gout** – a condition where uric acid levels are high in the blood. Over a 22 year period, the risk increases by 75%!!

Soft drinks contain 'empty calories' – a term that is used for sugar that is absorbed from the food and is not used to provide energy to the cells. Empty calories get converted to fat, and in turn lead to **obesity**. Soft drinks are high in phosphates that can bind to calcium and weaken bones and teeth.

#### The solution

Drink water when you are thirsty; it is just as satisfying and will quench your thirst. Drink soft drinks rarely and only in a small amount. To balance the loss of calcium, make sure you have a glass of milk later in the day.

### Sciatica – Painful and Annoying

Aches and pains in the body are annoying, and sciatica is no different. Sciatica is a common condition that describes pain down the sciatic nerve – the largest nerve of the leg. The nerve extends down from the lower back along the back of the thigh and the leg all the way to the foot. Here we take a look at this condition.

#### Causes of sciatica

Sciatica is caused by irritation of nerve roots of the lumbosacral spine – the lower part of the spinal column. This can occur due to degenerative disc disease, a condition where the soft cartilage discs that lie in between the back bones become broken down and worn off. Other conditions include narrowing of the spinal canal (called spinal stenosis), which can irritate the nerve fibres. Pregnancy is a well recognised cause due to the pressure that is placed on the nerve fibres by the pregnant womb. A slipped disc can also cause sciatica.

Many factors can contribute to the development of sciatica. The lack of exercise, being overweight and using poorly supportive mattresses are some of these factors.

#### Symptoms

The common symptoms include –

- Pain in the back of the leg that is worse when sitting down
- Weakness in the leg or difficulty moving the leg
- Shooting pains down the back of the leg
- Difficulty in standing up due to the pain
- Burning or tingling sensation down the leg

Sciatica often occurs down one leg alone. It can be mild or rather severe. Rare cases can cause loss of bowel and bladder control.

#### Diagnosis and treatment

Diagnosis is made through history and clinical examination. A straight leg raising (SLR) test may replicate the pain, confirming the diagnosis. Treatments include heat/ice application, painkillers and regular exercise. Physiotherapy can sometimes help. Some people may require surgery of the spinal discs or bones to help relieve the symptoms. Steroid injections have been tried with some success.

# Junk Foods – Do You Know What You Are Eating?



With westernisation of India and the rapid growth of the 'fast food' industry, more and more of us are now seeking quick solutions to satisfy our appetite. In addition to this, it is very difficult to help children eat healthy foods. Add to that, our busy lives leave us little time to eat food cooked at home, making fast foods a quick and easy solution to the problem.

Granted that junk foods may taste great, but what you are about to read below may make you think twice before you consume them. Burgers, fries, colas, pizzas, 'make your own' sandwiches etc. are all players in an epidemic that is obesity.

## What is junk food?

Junk food refers to food that is loaded with calories. These calories come from fats, oils and carbohydrates. Surprisingly, these foods taste great but do not fill the stomach in any way.

The term 'junk food' is a broad term. It is commonly classified into 2 main categories – snack foods and fast foods. Snack foods include products such biscuits, chocolate bars, cakes and chips. Fast foods include pizzas, burgers and similar foods that are available from popular eat out places that have popped up around the country.

## The problem with junk foods

Eating out has become common practice these days, and with the cropping up of shopping malls, fast food joints have also increased greatly in number. Food courts serve hot food in minutes, and it is common occurrence to see long queues at fast food joint counters where people are just waiting to tuck in.

The primary problem with junk foods is the calories that are consumed in a meal. The average male needs between 2000 to 3000 calories a day, while the average woman needs 1800 to 2400 calories a day. Daily requirements vary depending on the level of physical activity, with sedentary people requiring fewer calories than those lead more active lives. We obtain the required calories through the food we eat daily, which includes breakfast, lunch and dinner, along with other snacks and drinks in between. Having a healthy balanced meal will provide the required calories without the harmful fats and carbohydrates, thus helping maintain a good body weight.

We may easily reconcile ourselves with the notion that if we consume junk food and miss a meal, we will maintain a healthy body weight. But the facts about junk food are in fact rather frightening. Junk foods are low in fiber, high in calories (in a small volume of food), high in saturated fats and high in simple sugars.

Take the simple burger at your local fast food joint, for example. A single veggie sandwich contains around 430 calories along with 18 grams of fat, 6 gm of saturated fats and 650 mg of sodium. A paneer wrap contains over 800 calories with 51 gm of fat and 1.8 gm of sodium. That is nearly over half the daily requirement of sodium in a meal that will not even fill you. But then, that's just the burger! Add a side of medium fries to that, and you have added another 487 calories with 25 gm of fat and 370 mg of sodium. Finally, wash down the meal with a medium sugary drink, and you have added another 151 calories with 38 grams of sugar! We invite you to add up the total calories in a fast food joint meal, and you will most certainly find that 1 meal will provide more that 70% of the daily fat intake along with over 60% of the daily calorie intake in a person who leads an active life.

Combine this meal with your daily diet, and you will be well over 3500 calories a day, an excess of 80 to 90 gm of fat per day and a sodium intake that most certainly will get your blood pressure up.

But the trouble is not just in what you consume; it is also regarding what happens to the food once it is consumed. The high levels of saturated fats contribute to the development of atherosclerosis, which in turn can contribute to the development of a heart attack or stroke. The high sodium content can cause **hypertension**. The high calorie intake can lead to **obesity** and **type 2 diabetes**. The list can go on.

Now here is something else that will shock you. Let's say for example that you decide to indulge in a double scoop of your favourite ice-cream, topped with chocolate fudge sauce and roasted peanuts. Sounds delicious, does it not? Well, if you have enjoyed that, then you will have consumed around 800 to 1000 calories with a lot of sugar in just a few minutes. If you wish to burn it off with a walk, you will have walk at least 15 km at a brisk pace just for that one meal. Imagine that.

You may think that salads are healthy, but many salads are prepared with the addition of salad cream and mayonnaise. The caloric value of these foods along with their fat content is extremely high, making it more of an unhealthy meal than a healthy one.

Indian foods are no different to western ones. Our popular masala dosa served with coconut chutney is around 500 calories. Burning off one such dosa can take up to 50 minutes of running at a pace of 10km/hr on a treadmill.

## The solution

Opt for healthier choices if you visit a fast food restaurant. Avoid the fries, and have a glass of water instead of the soft drinks. Keep eating out to a minimum, and enjoy home cooked meals instead. These are way better as you will know what goes in the food. Keep your portion size reasonable, and never overeat. If possible, avoid adding too much salt and oil to food, and keep your intake of rice and rice items low.

Diet is not the only solution. If you wish to have a healthy heart and live a long and fruitful live, make sure you exercise at least 30 to 45 minutes a day without fail. The exercise should be rigorous, and not just a 'stroll in the park'. Recognise the harms of junk food and avoid it as much as you can, you will see yourself slim and fit in the years to come!

## Suicide – Are We Paying It Enough Attention?

In 2012, the World Health Organisation revealed a shocking statistic – India accounted for the highest number of suicides in the world! The report stated that over 258000 people committed suicide. 1.5 times more men than women commit suicide. For every 1 lakh people, 21 people were committing suicide, which is a staggeringly large number.



So what exactly is it that drives someone to the brink? Well, more often than not, it is clinical depression. Stress in our life is unavoidable, but how we handle that stress often defines the person we are. When stress gets too overwhelming and hard to handle, the thought of suicide sets in.

### Signs of a suicidal tendency

These signs are in no way a surety, but people who are suicidal feel hopeless, feel like they have failed in life, may be quiet all the time, are constantly preoccupied in their own thoughts, are deeply unhappy and many a time express the will to end their lives. They feel they may be a burden to others, and may start indulging in alcohol and drug abuse. The feeling of being trapped can be a sufficient enough driver to take the step toward suicide. Take note – being suicidal does not mean a person is psychotic. It means they have a great deal of emotional distress, and need help. It is, in a way, a cry for help.

### It's time to get help

Suicide is completely preventable, and requires that the individual (or their friend/family member) seek professional help as soon as possible. The stigma that was previously associated with mental health problems no longer exists in society, and by not seeking any medical attention, the individual is placing themselves in harm's way. Talking to a friend is often enough – share their thoughts and feelings with someone they trust, and they may even find a solution to their problems. Suicidal people are open to seeking help, so if you feel someone would benefit, make sure you get them the help that they need soon.

## Barley – Health Benefits

In India, we love our cereals. Wheat, rice, ragi and barley are some of the nutritious foods we enjoy on a daily basis.

While many of us consume barley, we do not really recognise the health benefits that it brings with it. Barley is very high in fiber, and has been shown to reduce cholesterol levels in individuals who have high cholesterol. In addition, it can bring down blood pressure as well. It is also believed that barley can maintain normal insulin levels and bring down blood sugars in the process.

When eating barley, an individual may notice themselves becoming fuller after a smaller meal. This has to do with the fiber content in the plant. Smaller portions means the blood sugars are better controlled, making barley a good food to consume if a person has diabetes. It is a rich source of vitamins, minerals, proteins and carbohydrates. Barley is sometimes applied to the skin to treat boils. It may also help treat a lung condition called bronchitis. It can enhance energy levels, building up strength and endurance in performing day to day activities. Barley also has mild diuretic properties, helping reduce swelling in the legs.

There is no doubt that barley is an amazing plant. Make sure you make it a part of your regular, healthy diet.

## Diet Drinks – Are They The Healthier Option?

Recent years have seen the emergence of 'diet drinks' – drinks that claim to be 'zero calorie' and the 'healthier version' of sugary drinks. But this fact is not really clear.

While it is correct that diet drinks have virtually no sugar as compared to other sugary drinks, there is a fair bit of evidence that they may be as bad.

Studies published have shown that regular consumption of diet drinks is associated with the development of obesity, type 2 diabetes and metabolic syndrome. In fact, just one can of a diet soda per day is sufficient to cause these. Studies conducted in the University of Miami have shown that diet soda consumption on a regular basis can increase the risk of developing **heart attacks and strokes by 48%**. However, these results must be interpreted with caution, as the study was just too small to actually reflect what is happening in the majority of the population.

It remains unclear still as to what the long term harms of drinking diet sodas are, but either way it is best to completely avoid them. Have water or fresh fruits instead – they are clearly healthier!!!

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*The woods are lovely, dark and deep. But I have promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep. - Robert Frost*