

Lady, It's Time You Cared for Yourself

Working women tend to compromise on their nutrition and fitness needs, paying a heavy price in the process. The solution is right eating and regular exercise, writes **Shruti Pathak**

She is the hand that rocks the cradle. She is the boss in office handling clients all day. She manages her home and looks after her family's needs too. She is today's working woman, juggling work and family with elan. But amid all this, women are stretching themselves to strike a balance between work and family, all at the cost of their health, not looking after themselves and not watching out for possible health warnings.

A survey conducted by industry body Assocham in 2014 said 42% of working women suffered from lifestyle diseases like backache, obesity, depression, diabetes, hypertension and heart ailments.

SO, WHAT'S GOING WRONG?

Weakness due to nutritional deficiency is common in working women in urban areas. While multitasking, women are seen to be compromising on their diet. With increased responsibilities at home, a lot of working women tend to skip breakfast. A study revealed that one in three Indians and more women than men skip breakfast. It only means that more women tend to rely on processed and packaged foods to satisfy hunger pangs during office hours, resulting in unhealthy weight gain. A 2012 study on urban working women found that about 80% of them in the 25-45 age group were overweight. "Working women's immune systems are being challenged more than ever. We have some of the poorest eating habits on the planet and we are stressed out. Immune system dysfunction is on the rise," said Dr Alka Kumar, consultant gynaecologist at Fortis SL Raheja Hospital, Mumbai.

KNOW THE NUTRIENTS

Women should consume food rich in iron, folic acid, proteins, amino acids, vitamins A, C, B12 and other vitamins of B-complex group, like niacin and pantothenic acid. A deficiency of these nutrients may lead to anaemia, which affects an estimated 50% of the country's population. According to the National Family Health Survey III, one in every two Indian women suffers from some form of anaemia.

Women require calcium more than men as they are likely to develop bone health problems with age. The daily requirement of calcium for women aged 19-50 years is 1,000 mg. Enough vitamin D, which can be got from exposure to sunlight and some foods, is a must for calcium absorption. Adequate levels of magnesium are also important as they too have an indirect effect on calcium absorption. Without vitamin D and magnesium, calcium may not be fully utilised, and under absorption problems may occur, leading to arthritis, osteoporosis, menstrual cramps and some premenstrual symptoms.

Magnesium also helps improve cardiovascular function and tissue health, besides providing relief to women struggling with PMS, including premenstrual migraines, irritability and cramps. Doctors say daily requirement of magnesium for women in the age group of 31-50 is 320 mg.



"Women need more nutrients than men. The different nutritional needs are due to male and female hormones. Many working women face iron deficiency because of blood loss during menstruation. Also, it is difficult for them to have a proper meal during work time. So it is important to include meat, fish and poultry in one's regular diet. Vegetarians should consume spinach, kidney beans, black beans, lentils and split peas," said Dr Sunita P Shekhar, consultant, obstetrics and gynaecology, Motherhood Hospitals, Bengaluru.

THE STRESS IS SHOWING

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DON'T COMPROMISE

A nutritious daily diet can help smoothen out the bumpy road of unhealthy lifestyle. Having a healthy breakfast that includes foods like milk and oats, bananas, dry fruits and fruits should be on every woman's priority list," said Kumar. As working women are short of time and travel a lot, they can carry small snack boxes packed with theplas, boiled eggs and sandwiches, she said.

KS Latha, a nutritionist based in Bengaluru, said, "Go for traditional Indian breakfast items like idlis and poha rather than packaged breakfast cereals which are highly processed." Boiled moong and chickpeas, with mild seasoning and a dash of lemon, also make for a healthy snack during office hours. You can also carry salads. Sip on buttermilk and tender coconut rather than opting for sugary beverages, she said.

SUPPLEMENTS ARE FOR SPECIAL CASES
Sedentary



First Person

Priya Chetty-Rajagopal
Executive Director-Leadership & Board Practice, RGF Executive Search

I Walk to Work

I begin my day with tuls extract in water, three almonds and a spoon of Chyawanprash. Then I go out for a walk with my husband. Of late, I have been really walking a lot. Of course when you have a dog, you have no choice - it's fun and it works for you. I love greenery, so my walks are very therapeutic for the mind and body. I feel charged up and inspired with my green vitamins! In fact, I even walk to work. I gave up my driver, so I even walk back home. I think walking is better than running and you tend to feel more connected with things around

you. I also try and practice at least 10 minutes of yoga and breathing in the morning. It builds up your immunity especially in a city like Bangalore where you end up with nagging colds. I sometimes take a calcium and multivit supplement with breakfast. Oats, cornflakes and lots of fruits is what I have for breakfast. I come home for lunch, which is again regular Indian food. I don't particularly have a sweet tooth but would really love to give up sugar sometime. The key to healthy living is having proper breakfast and combining it with some form of exercise. But most importantly we should not forget to laugh...it makes all the difference.

lifestyle and changing food habits are also making women take the easy route by popping supplements to make up for gaps in nutrition. "Supplements can be the best source of nutrients when working women are going through stress. Multivitamins, multiminerals and spirulina can play a significant role as antioxidants and also combat deficiency. But one should not overdo it. Supplements are essential while planning for pregnancy, lactation and also at the perimenopause (the phase before the final cessation of periods) stages. Herbal supplements are better and safer to use, as they have less or no adverse effects," said Dr Muhammed Majeed, founder and chairman of Sami Labs.

According to Shekhar, supplements are only useful in safeguarding one against occasional nutrient shortfall. They can't compensate for an unbalanced or unhealthy diet.

"Supplements of evening primrose oil are important for women suffering from skin, menstua-

tion and fertility problems. Calcium supplements are important for ladies at all ages, especially during pregnancy, lactation and after menopause. Omega 3 fatty acid supplements are beneficial in reducing cholesterol in women with cardiovascular diseases and high blood pressure. Supplements are there only for special cases. A woman's diet should comprise a lot of fruits, green vegetables and milk products," said Dr Zeenat Ahmed, consultant, internal medicine, Jaypee Hospital, Noida. "If working women are following a nutritious diet, they need not take these supplements. Doctors recommend supplements only if the patient is having issues like premenstrual discomfort, hormonal offset and mood swings," said Kumar of SL Raheja.

So how do women deal with changes in their body without having to depend too much on supplements? Doctors say women should cut down on animal fats, sugar, alcohol and caffeine. Highly processed carbohydrates such as biscuits and chips should be avoided while excess salt and sugar in diet should be done away with.

LISTEN TO THE SIGNALS

"A woman's body undergoes many changes like motherhood and menopause. Any change in the menstrual cycle should be taken seriously and a doctor should be consulted immediately. For women above 35, oral contraceptives are not recommended. Regular checkups are a must. Support from family is of utmost importance as well," said Kumar.

WALK AND STRETCH

Exercise goes a long way in keeping the mind and body fit. Despite a strenuous schedule at home and work, women should take time out for physical activity like yoga or join a class on weekends to break away from the monotony. "They should take out at least 30-40 minutes every day for any form of exercise. Any aerobic exercise - like jogging, cycling or yoga - will be of immense help. Proper sleep for at least seven hours a day is a must for working women to combat stress at work and home," said Ahmed.



THINKSTOCK

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