

## Maternal Beliefs Regarding Diet During Common Childhood Illnesses

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Lack of dietary education is one of the major drawback in our country. In this vast country, where illiteracy, superstitions prevail in every aspect of rural life, maternal dietary misbeliefs may throw our children into the dangerous zone of malnutrition. Unnecessary restriction of diet during childhood illness is one of the aspects of these misbelief. The present study was, therefore, undertaken to evaluate the prevalent maternal beliefs regarding diet during common childhood illness.

### Subjects and Methods

The study was carried out at Kutumba, Aurangabad, Bihar, a rural community development block. Thirty five Anganwadi areas were randomly selected and in each area five mothers, each with atleast one underfive child was interviewed. Each mother was ad-

ministered pretested, semistructured open ended questionnaire prepared in local language.

### Results and Discussion

Among the mothers, 94% were illiterate and belonged to low socioeconomic status. The preferred and restricted foods during different illnesses and marasmus are shown in *Table I*.

Many foods were thought to be cold, e.g., curd, fruits and rice. Some are thought to be light like sago, barley, and biscuits. These are preferred during cough and fever. This finding is in conformity with that of Kumar(1). During marasmus, vegetable oils or ghee and whole milk were restricted by 64% and 74% mothers, respectively. Previously Duttal *et al.*(2) showed total restriction of these foods in their study. About 89.7% mothers thought costly foods like fruits are of great nutritional value. During diarrhea light foods were preferred over so called heavy foods as previously reported(3). Measles was thought to be due to wrath of 'Mata', as a result so called good food which are fried were avoided(4).

Our study revealed that instead of providing more nutrition during illnesses to meet the increased demand of body, the practice of food restriction is prevalent which may lead to disastrous consequences. These beliefs are deep-rooted and can only be changed with vigorous health education and improvement in literacy. Appropriate nutritional education must, therefore be imparted to mothers of children with common ailments.

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**TABLE I—Maternal Beliefs Regarding Diet During Common Childhood Illnesses**

| Disease  | Food restricted      |     |      | Food Preferred   |      |      |
|----------|----------------------|-----|------|------------------|------|------|
|          | Food                 | No. | %    | Food             | No.  | %    |
| Cough    | Butter Milk (Mattha) | 165 | 94.2 | Roti             | 158  | 90.2 |
|          | Curd                 | 165 | 94.2 | Tea              | 121  | 69.1 |
|          | Fruits               | 125 | 71.4 | Gur              | 85   | 48.5 |
|          | Rice                 | 112 | 64.0 | Honey            | 77   | 44.0 |
|          |                      |     |      | Tulsi Leaf       | 65   | 37.1 |
| Marasmus |                      |     |      | Jafar            | 60   | 34.2 |
|          | Roti                 | 165 | 94.2 | Fruits           | 157  | 89.7 |
|          | Milk                 | 125 | 71.4 | Goat Milk        | 121  | 86.2 |
|          | Oil & Ghee           | 112 | 64.0 | Diluted Milk     | 142  | 81.1 |
|          |                      |     |      | Barley           | 70.0 | 40.0 |
| Measles  |                      |     |      | Khichari         | 50   | 28.5 |
|          | Roti                 | 128 | 73.1 | Tea              | 60   | 34.2 |
|          | Curd                 | 148 | 84.5 | Milk             | 85   | 48.5 |
| Fever    | Vegetable            | 123 | 70.2 | Biscuits         | 118  | 67.4 |
|          | Rice                 | 148 | 84.5 | Sago             | 115  | 65.7 |
|          | Curd                 | 128 | 73.1 | Barley           | 136  | 77.7 |
|          | Butter Milk          | 128 | 73.1 | Bisuits          | 96   | 54.8 |
|          | Banana               | 120 | 68.5 | Fruit            | 68   | 38.8 |
| Diarrhea |                      |     |      | Bread            | 49   | 28.0 |
|          | Roti                 | 162 | 92.5 | Over cooked rice | 162  | 92.5 |
|          | Vegetables           | 148 | 84.5 | Curd             | 148  | 84.5 |
|          | Pulses               | 128 | 73.1 | Barley           | 136  | 77.7 |
|          | Milk                 | 90  | 51.4 | Diluted milk     | 92   | 52.5 |

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