The Indian Diet Reset

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The Indian Diet Reset

A Doctor's Guide to Making Ghar ka Khana Healthier

Dr Anshuman Kaushal

juggernaut

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Introduction

Why We're So Confused About Food

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Let me tell you about the most dangerous meal I've ever seen.

It wasn't street food from a dodgy stall. It wasn't an exotic berry a patient ate because a YouTube guru called it a 'superfood'. It was a perfectly ordinary Tuesday dinner in a perfectly ordinary middle-class Indian household. Rice. Dal. A thin dish that was mostly water pretending to be cooked vegetables. Maybe a sliver of pickle for excitement. And the family eating it believed – truly, deeply, with the conviction of people who've never been told otherwise – that this was a 'balanced meal'.

It wasn't. Not even close.

That plate had roughly 70 per cent carbohydrates, almost no protein worth measuring, barely any fibre, negligible micronutrients and enough refined starch to keep a pancreas working overtime for six hours

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straight. Multiply that plate by three meals a day, 365 days a year, across a billion people – and you begin to understand why India now has 101 million diabetics, 136 million prediabetics and one of the highest rates of premature heart disease on the planet. These aren't numbers from some alarmist blog. They're from an Indian Council of Medical Research–India Diabetes (ICMR–INDIAB) study that conducted the largest nationally representative diabetes survey in India, covering 1,13,043 individuals across all 31 states and union territories, published in *Lancet Diabetes & Endocrinology* in 2023.[1]

But here's the thing that keeps me up at night. This family didn't eat badly out of poverty. They didn't eat badly out of ignorance, in the way their grandparents might have. They ate badly believing they were eating well. That's the truly dangerous part. You can fix ignorance with information. Confident misinformation? That's a disease of a different order entirely.

And do you know who convinced this family their dinner was fine? Not a doctor or a registered dietitian. A wellness influencer on Instagram with 3,00,000 followers, a ring light and zero medical training. She had posted a reel titled 'The Perfect Indian

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Thali for Health' that racked up 2 million views. Her qualifications were … Well, let's just say the ring light was the most credible thing in the frame.

Welcome to the modern age of nutrition, where everyone is an expert, nobody agrees and your dinner plate has become a battleground for people who can't tell the difference between a randomized controlled trial and a random opinion they formed in the shower.

This book exists because I got angry about that. Properly angry. The kind that makes you sit down and write.

Too Much Information, Too Many 'Experts'

Nutrition advice now arrives faster than a Mumbai local and with fewer safety checks. By breakfast, one reel has banned rice. By lunch, another has prescribed ghee. By dinner, the family WhatsApp group has declared ajwain (carom seeds) as a cure for everything from gas to geopolitical tensions. Meanwhile, the pancreas has switched off its notifications.

Here's a number that should terrify you. In 2002, the world's scientific community published 71 research papers on healthy eating. By 2021, that number

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had exploded to 1,764 papers per year[2] – a 25-fold increase in under two decades. PubMed, the world's largest medical research database, added 1.57 million new citations in 2023[3] alone. And that's just the peer-reviewed, went-through-actual-scrutiny kind. It doesn't count the 47 billion blog posts, YouTube videos, podcast episodes, WhatsApp forwards and unsolicited opinions from your neighbour's cousin's gym trainer who 'read something interesting about turmeric'.

Now, a reasonable person might think: more research means more clarity, more answers and more certainty about what to eat. That reasonable person would be spectacularly wrong.

Here's a dirty secret of nutrition science that no headline will ever tell you: *the more we study food, the more contradictory the findings become*. A group of researchers did something wickedly clever. They picked 50 common ingredients – things you'd find in any kitchen – and checked whether each had been linked to cancer in published scientific literature. Turns out, 40 out of the 50 ingredients were associated with cancer risk in peer-reviewed journals. But of those 40, roughly equal numbers of studies said the ingredient caused cancer and

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protected against it. Same food. Same scientific databases. Opposite conclusions. Published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, no less, under the gloriously honest title, 'Is Everything We Eat Associated with Cancer?'[4]

The answer, apparently, is yes. And also no. Depending on which study you read, which day you read it and whether the authors had a grant that needed renewing.

Let me make this personal. Take the humble egg. Your grandmother swore by it. Fed you two every morning and said it would make you strong. Then in the 1970s, science declared eggs a cardiac time bomb – too much cholesterol. Dietary guidelines told you to eat no more than two a week. Entire generations grew up afraid of the egg. Then a massive meta-analysis – 39 studies tracking nearly 2 million people[5] – found no convincing evidence that moderate egg consumption raises cardiovascular risk. If anything, up to one egg a day was linked to slightly lower risk. The US Dietary Guidelines Committee discreetly removed the 300-milligram daily cholesterol limit in 2015[6] – a limit that had been gospel for half a century. Reversed. Gone. Half a century of fear about the egg, undone with a shrug and a revised appendix.

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