

A Study of Social Taboos of Food Habits in Lactating Women

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Abstract

In many countries, women have to deal with food restriction during their lactation. Many of these food taboos are related to animal source food or fruits and vegetables. Restriction of these foods during lactation can be very harmful for both the mother and infants as essential nutrients such as protein and vitamins are lacking in the diet.

In India malnutrition is very common in low socio-economic families but it is not limited to them, well to do families do present with malnutrition due to ignorance and superstitions.

In the present study it was found that some foods like rice, green leafy vegetable, curd and sour foods, citrus fruits, black gram dal, brinjal, Arbi , pumpkin are mostly avoided by lactating women. Some also avoid heeng due to undesirable smell in breast milk.

It is practiced that women should be given food after 2-3 days after delivery. Mostly women avoid water, coldwater, and cold food after delivery.

All the taboos do not have a logical explanation. Few are accepted due to certain logic others are accepted because some senior family members says so. Few taboos are so much in-rooted that they are accepted without any logical approach.

Keywords: Lactation, Food Taboos, Mal Nutrition

Introduction

Food is a prime necessity of life. Even a religious book such as "GITA" recognizes the basic Dictum "of food are being made". While writing about glow worm H.G. Wells has also stated that "Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are."

Our health is directly related to our nutrition and our nutrition is of course related to our food habits .habits regarding taking foods and beverages, liking or disliking of various food items is considered as food or eating habits. Taboos are defined as social or religious customs prohibiting a [particular practiceor forbidding association with a particular person, place or thing. Food taboos are present in almost every human society regardless of location or climate.

Taboos and superstition may interface with adequate food intake especially by vulnerable groups.

Food taboos regarding lactation were practiced out of fear that the child would be adversely affected through the breast milk if the mother consumes certain food.

Many foods are excluded during the lactation. The absurdity these fads will be evident when we find that the foods avoided by one groups are those recommended by another groups.

Importance of Study

Food taboos regarding lactation were practice out of fear that the child would be adversely affected through the breast milk. Nutrition is very important during lactation as it help in the post-partum recovery of mother and proper growth of infants because infants solely depend on mother for nutrition.

So the present study has emphasized to study social taboos of food habits in lactating women.

Aim of the Study

1. To study the extent of involvement of social food taboos in nutrition of lactating women
2. To study the reasons of food taboos.

Methodology

The study on social taboos of food habits was carried out on 100 females randomly chosen from the society belonging to different cast and religion, nuclear and joint families, different socio-economic status and any age with special focus on lactating mothers.

Interview cum questionnaire method was used for data collections. The questionnaire included the straight forward questions and the participants responded to these questions according to the facts they knew.

Results and Discussion

All the participants responds positively stating that few food are harmful in lactation and few are beneficial so change in diet are inevitable.

55.6% supported that food should be avoided for 2-3 days after delivery.

Water drinking should be avoided after delivery was accepted by 69.1% females.

Taboos that green leafy vegetables are better avoided by lactating women for 3 months after delivery was supported by 27.9% women including that it may produce green stool in infants.

70-75% women ignore cold water and cold food in lactation because they think that it is harmful for infants and causes cold and cough.

69.11% female said that sour items and curds etc. should be avoided by lactating women with an argument that breast feeding by such mothers induces vomiting in infants due to sourness of breast milk.

Lactating women should avoided black gram gal, Brinjal, Arbi, pumpkin was supported by 64.7% females. 40% women were agreed that heeng is better avoided by lactating mother because of undesirable smell in breast milk.

Conclusion

Nursing mothers are often bombared with nutritional advice: you must eat these foods to produce good quality milk or you must avoid those foods because they may be harmful to the babies. Some of these traditions and beliefs about nursing mothers and infants do have nutritional value while others can be harmful to both the mother and infant.

Table No.1
Responses for the statement

S.No.	Statement	Total %	
1	Avoid food after 3 days of delivery	55.6	44.4
2	Avoid large quantity of water	69.1	30.9
3	Avoid cold water	79	30
4	Avoid cold food	75	25
5	Avoid taking rice in diet	50	50
6	Avoid green leafy vegetable	27.9	72.1
7	Avoid curd and sore foods	69.1	30.9
8	Avoid black gram dal	64.7	35.3
9	Avoid brinjal, colcasia, pumpkin.	54.7	45.3
10	Avoid heeng	40	60

Table No. 2
Special Foods Avoided During Lactation

S. No.	Food Stuff	Reasons	%
1	Water	Enlargement of abdomen	69.1
2	Cold water	Harmful for infants (can cause cough and cold)	70
3	Cold food	Harmful for infants(can cause cough and cold)	75
4	Rice	Increasing fats in body and enlargement of abdomen	50
5	Black gram dal	Undesirable effect on infants and gas formation	64.7
6	Brinjal, calcasia, pumpkin	Not easily digested	54.7
7	Heeng	Undesirable smell in breast milk	40
8	Curd and sore food	Indigestion of milk in infants	69.1
9	Green leafy vegetable	Green stools in infants	27.9

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