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EMPTY CALORIES AND FAT-SOLUBLE VITAMINS MALNUTRITION: THE ROLE OF SCHOOL FACTORS IN CONTROLLING THE TREND

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Abstract

This study highlights the importance of fat-soluble vitamins (A, D, E, and K) and the risks associated with excessive consumption of empty calories (ECs). ECs, found in foods like fast food, sugary drinks, and junk food, can lead to malnutrition, obesity, and related health issues. The study emphasizes the crucial role schools play in promoting healthy eating habits and controlling ECs consumption. Schools can assess the problem, develop policies, advocate for healthy food options, and educate students and parents about nutrition. Vitamins are essential micronutrients required by the human biological system for vital body functions. They are categorized into water-soluble vitamins (B-complex and C) and fat-soluble vitamins (A, D, E, and K). Fat-soluble vitamins are stored in the liver or fatty tissues and can cause toxicity if taken excessively. Empty calories, found in foods like fast food, sugary drinks, and junk food, can lead to malnutrition, obesity, and related health issues. The consumption of empty calories can activate the brain's reward system, leading to addiction. Schools play a crucial role in promoting healthy eating habits and controlling empty calories consumption through assessment, policy development, and advocacy. The study concludes that schools can significantly contribute to reducing ECs consumption and promoting fat-soluble vitamin intake, ultimately improving students' health and well-being.

Keywords: *Empty Calories, Fat-Soluble Vitamins, Malnutrition, School Factors*

INTRODUCTION

Vitamins are typically groups of essential micronutrients required by the human biological system in small amount for the purpose of vital body functions. Vitamins are mainly categorized or divided as water soluble vitamins (a group consisting of vitamin B-complex, and vitamins C), and fat-

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soluble vitamins (which comprise vitamins A, D, E, and K). Fat-soluble vitamins in contrast to the water soluble vitamins can be stored in the liver or fatty tissues, and are slowly eliminated from the body. Eating excess amount of fat-soluble vitamins is likely to cause toxicity more rapidly, while poor diet and some conditions can cause deficiency of fat-soluble vitamins (FSVs) (The Republic of Sudan Federal Ministry of Health, 2017; UNICEF, 2021). Vitamins are essential micronutrients required by the human biological system for vital body functions, categorized into water-soluble vitamins (B-complex and C) and fat-soluble vitamins (A, D, E, and K). Fat-soluble vitamins are stored in the liver or fatty tissues and can cause toxicity if taken excessively.

Empty calories, found in foods like fast food, sugary drinks, and junk food, lead to malnutrition, obesity, and related health issues. The consumption of empty calories activates the brain's reward system, leading to addiction. Schools play a crucial role in promoting healthy eating habits and controlling empty calories consumption through assessment, policy development, and advocacy. The fat-soluble vitamins, including vitamins A, D, E, and K, have distinct functions, dietary sources, and deficiency symptoms. Vitamin A is essential for vision, immune function, and growth, while vitamin D is crucial for bone health and immune function. Vitamin E acts as an antioxidant, and vitamin K is necessary for blood clotting and bone health. Understanding the importance of these vitamins and the risks associated with empty calories can help individuals make informed choices about their diet and lifestyle (Khader, 2021). This study highlights the importance of fat-soluble vitamins (A, D, E, and K) and the risks associated with excessive consumption of empty calories (ECs).

Empty Calories (ECs)

Empty calories are typically beverages, fast foods, and junk foods. The hazardous nature of empty calories is due to the followings:

- They contain solid fats, for instance, butter, cheese, pizza, hot dogs, sausages
- They contain added sugars such as in the case of sodas, sport drinks, fruit drinks
- Some of them contain both solid fats and added sugars altogether (examples include ice-creams, cakes, donuts, and pastries).
- They contain preservatives
- Some of them contain sodium

Indeed, too much consumption of empty calories is a problematic issue (UNICEF, 2019). It leads to obesity and associated disorders like diabetes, and hypertension. However, the example of empty calories could also be cited as candies, cakes, fast food, flavored drinks, biscuits, pastries, gums, and alcoholic drinks. Therewith, typical examples of healthy foods include, vegetables, fruits, sweet potato, yams, kidney beans, skinless chicken, oats, nuts, etc (Khader, 2021).

Altercation of Empty Calories and Fat-Soluble Vitamins

ECs are mostly taken by the consumers (including students and staff) with great sense of enthusiasm because the stuffs are prone to addiction (The Republic of Sudan Federal Ministry of Health, 2017). The ECs consumption excites the parts of the brain or nervous system to activate and imitate the reward system that lead to happiness or highness in turn. This happiness is facilitated initially by the presence of taste (such as sweet, and flavor) due to the substances added in empty calories. Because of this feeling, the consumers tend to look for more of the empty calories. Therefore, routine use may lead to addiction and on the other fold; excess use of empty calories is disastrous to students and teachers. Heavy consumers of ECs are consequently deprived of water-soluble vitamins (among others) therefore could develop signs of food insecurity or malnutrition or malnutrition overtime. Poor intake of water-soluble vitamins has several impacts that affect learning or education. For instance, some consequences are stated in Table 1.

Table 1: Some Consequences of Water-Soluble Vitamins has Several Impacts

S/N	Vitamin	Effect of Insufficiency	Consequences on education
1	A	Poor immunity, poor vision, poor cognition	Poor school attendance and poor performance
2	D	Poor bone health	Poor performance in psychoactive activities or exercise
3	K	Poor blood clotting	Poor health leads to poor attendance or poor concentration
4	E	Poor antioxidant activities	Poor health leads to poor attendance or poor concentration

Role of Institutional or School Factors in Controlling Empty Calories Prevalence

School has major roles to play in order to clampdown empty calories. The school has the duty to perform the following functions:

- Assessment of the problem-The school have the duty to examine te issue and assess the magnitude of empty calories in school and fish-out the causes and address them. This can be done be carrying out various relevant researches and interventions or explorations (Cena & Calder, 2020).
- Policy development-The school have the responsibility of protecting the health of actors. Therefore, it is imperative for schools to make decisions that are helpful, for example, ensuring that students or staff cook foods at school by providing utensils, raw materials, water supply, and environmental support. Ensuring that students come with healthy foods from home, providing ample break time to prepare and consume healthy foods. Other methods include

ensuring that markets at schools sell healthy foods at affordable prices and are situated in accessible locations. Making laws that ban Empty calories at schools is very significant (Nnam, n.d.).

- Advocacy-Advocacy requires that schools advocate (campaign) for making laws bt the government in order to provide school feeding, ban food deserts in school and ban food swamps around school premises as well. Call on parents to provide healthy foods to wars, and call on government to compel that. Advocacy involves providing health education to parents or the public. This will encourage parents and policy makers to help wards or citizens access healthy foods through interventions such as creation of healthy foods markets around schools and other built-in areas. Advocacy also modifies the mind minds of students towards healthy eating (NICERT, (2024).

Vitamin D

Vitamin D is a major player in the metabolism of calcium and phosphorus in the human biological system. Vitamin D increases the amount of calcium absorbed from the intestines, and also help in maintaining bones (and their formation). Vitamin D plays role in body's immunity, cell growth regulation, and assists by conferring protection against osteoporosis. Vitamin D is likely to help in protecting the body against cancer, high blood pressure, and other similar diseases (Khader, 2021).

Dietary Sources

Dietary sources of vitamin D primarily include the milk, and fortified products. Other sources of vitamin D include oily fish (such as herrings, sardines, and salmons), cod liver oil, and sunlight.

Deficiency and Overload

Dark skin people, elderly people, people in the habit of frequently covering their skin, and diseased people (such as those with fat metabolism malabsorption syndrome, obese, and inflammatory bowel syndrome) may have poor absorption of vitamin D. Vitamin D deficiency may be found in about 1 billion people around the world. It may be common in people living in closed -doors, and vegetarians. Sign and symptoms of vitamin D deficiency in growing youngsters include rickets (characterized with soft bowed legs and long legs), and flattening of the back of the skull. In adult vitamin D deficiency could lead osteomalacia (weakness of the bones and muscles). Similarly, vitamin D deficiency is linked to increase risk of cancers, hypertension, autoimmune diseases, and infectious diseases. Vitamin D overload instigate it's accumulation in the liver and signs of poisoning manifest in the form of hypercalcemia, slowed physical and mental growth, poor appetite, vomiting, and nausea (Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries Uganda, 2015).

Vitamin K

Naturally, the specific intestinal bacteria make vitamin K in the human biological system. The vitamin K is essentially playing significant role in blood clotting, bine health, production of proteins

(for blood, kidneys, and bones) (Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries Uganda, 2015).

Dietary Sources of Vitamin K

The dietary sources of vitamin K include green leafy vegetables (such as cauliflower, spinach, broccoli), oil producing seeds or vegetables (such as olive oil, soybean oil, cottonseed oil), and animal foods.

Deficiency and Overload

Insufficiency of vitamin K results in hemorrhage. The deficiency could be noticed in people (especially infants) who consume anticoagulants such as warfarin or Coumadin, and antibiotics drugs. People that may risk vitamin K deficiency include frequent consumers of antibiotics, and people suffering from diarrhea. Overload of vitamin K may result in breaking of red cells and damage to the liver (Clifford & Kozil, 2017).

Vitamin A

Vitamin A is otherwise denoted as retinol, it is a typical fat-soluble vitamin that serves in many body functions. It help the eyes to adjust to light, changes, and play roles in tooth development, bone growth and health, gene expression, reproduction, cell division, and regular functioning of human immune system functioning. The moisture needed by mouth, throat, nose, and mouth is ensured by vitamin as an antioxidant, and cancer prevention (Clifford & Kozil, 2017).

Dietary Sources of Vitamin A

The best way to nutritional health in most of the times is consumption of varieties of healthy foods. This will help people to obtain enough vitamin A for health, growth, and development. Purposely, the retinol, retinal, and retinoic forms of vitamin A are derived through consumption of animal-based foods such as liver, fish, and dairy products. Plant-based specific sources of vitamin A containing Beta-carotene include fruits and vegetables (especially oranges and dark colored). Specifically, the carrots, winter squash, spricots, pumpkin, dark greenly vegetables are rich in Beta-carotene (Clifford & Kozil, 2017).

Vitamin A Overdose and Deficiency

Vitamin A belongs to water-soluble vitamins that are stored in the body for over a considerable time, they are not easily excreted (ekinnaite) like the water-soluble vitamins; therefore more prone to overdose. When taken in excess vitamin A cause developmental problems, it is indeed teratogenic. During the time of prescription of high doses of vitamin A for pregnant women, about 84% of them had children with deformities. In this vein, as of today, the recommended level of vitamin A is 900 International Unit for males, and 700 for females. Manan (1994) reported that high doses of vitamin A cause symptoms such as disturbed hair growth, redness of skin, and peeling, loss of appetite and sickness. Liver injury was also narrated. Other reports disclosed that bone lesions, destruction of

cartilage, hemorrhage, and congenital abnormalities are due to high levels of vitamin A (Manan, 1994). Mostly, people who obtain vitamin A excess natural foods were not feeling the overdose effects. Overdose effects are mostly in people taking supplements or biofortified sources (Marzada & Luszcki, 2019).

Vitamin A deficiency elicits abnormalities in growth of bone tissue, cessation of growth (in animal), night blindness, reduced reproductive ability, changes in epithelial growth. Mostly, people who take excess vitamin A from natural foods may not feel the effects of overdose. In the eye retina needs vitamin a fir proper vision. Ideally, vitamin A (retinol) is required to help the nerve cells of the eye function properly. Lack or insufficiency of vitamin A affect nerve cells function, therewith, the components of retina rods and cones) are affected. Rods are for color vision, while cones are for dim light vision. In the retina retinol (react) interact with opsin to make rhodopsin, as results of conformational changes on rhodopsin signals are sent to the brain (for us to see things). Poor level of retinol lead to poor level of rhodopsin, then night vision is first to be severely affected. Night blindness or myctalogia is due to poor level of retinol. Another problem is xerophthalmia. Poor level of retinol causes epithelial cells of the eye to die and form a layer that occludes vision (Neogi, 2012; Cena & Calder, 2020).

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Conclusion

In conclusion, the prevalence of empty calories and fat-soluble vitamins malnutrition can be controlled through school-based interventions. Schools have a critical role to play in promoting healthy eating habits, assessing the problem, developing policies, and advocating for healthy food options. By working together, we can reduce the risk of malnutrition and related health issues, and ensure that students have the nutrients they need to grow and thrive.

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