

# India's 'Diet Paradox'

A report by **Nu-Shakti**



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## Executive summary

A healthy and balanced diet has always been a part of Indian heritage and culture. According to Ayurveda, a traditional system of medicine that originated over three millennia ago in the South Asian region, food is an essential requirement in life and one can attain good health by following a proper, natural diet<sup>1</sup>.

Rise in education, technology, and affluent lifestyle have all contributed to increased awareness levels across the Indian demographic landscape<sup>2</sup>. In recent times, 90 million health conscious individuals who are affluent, living in urban areas and are both aware and concerned about lifestyle-related health issues<sup>3</sup>. On the other hand, India is home to 77 million diabetics, second highest in the world<sup>4</sup> and almost one in every three Indian adults is affected by hypertension<sup>5</sup>.

Therefore, we, at Nu-Shakti, wanted to find out whether the ever-growing awareness of health conscious consumers does in fact translate into action? If not, what is the reason for this paradox? Why do nutrition-conscious and aware consumers continue to indulge in behaviour detrimental to their health? Do they become more or less nutrition-conscious with age? Does work-life play a role or is regular interruptions to a healthy diet-plan the culprit?

Are consumers really aware of issues related to health and nutrition and why does their behaviour not always reflect this consideration? This is the background to this piece of research by Nu Shakti, a brand of DSM India.

Contextualising the research, **Alok Kohli, Business Director – DSM India** said, “Today, people are already aware that adhering to a healthy and nutritious diet promotes their wellbeing. The new challenge for them is taking practical action and adding nutritive elements in their diet on a regular basis.”

“India is home to 77 million diabetics, second highest in the world and almost one in every three Indian adults is affected by hypertension.”

“Nu-Shakti’s mission has always been to develop affordable nutritious products and make them accessible across urban and rural India, and recently, we have entered the e-commerce space as well. The objective is to make a positive impact on the health of people across the country via our innovative products that address widespread nutritional deficiency by making Nu-Shakti product portfolio available to consumers in the comfort of their homes,” he said.

The report is based on face-to-face interviews conducted by Innovative Research Services (India) Pvt. Ltd., with over 1,011 Indians of all ages across Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, and Kolkata between February/March 2020, and is supported by extensive desk research. The result is a comprehensive view of the role of nutrition in the lives of Indians.

Throughout the report, those between 18 and 25 have been referred to as Gen Z, those between 26 and 35 have been addressed as millennials or Gen Y, and those between 36 and 45 have been called Gen X. All the findings from our survey are supported by extensive secondary research in both urban and rural areas.

We hope that you find the research findings and insights as intriguing and interesting as we do.



# Chapter 1:

The diet 'awareness-action' gap

**Nu-Shakti** | India's 'Diet Paradox'



## The ‘Diet Paradox’

Diet and nutrition play a major role in the health of a nation. Today, consumers demand a range of natural products that deliver health benefits in convenient formats<sup>6</sup>. However, the Global Burden of Diseases study ranked India 118th on the global index, since poor dietary habits accounted for 310 deaths per 100,000 people<sup>7</sup>. This conundrum, where awareness levels about nutrition and diet are high, but do not necessarily result in the right action is something Nu-Shakti calls the ‘Diet Paradox’.

A 2019 study by Ipsos found that 74% of Indians are happy with their current body weight. Nearly seven out of ten—67%—also confessed that the only reason they choose to visit a gym, go for a walk or follow an exercise regimen is so that they would not have to watch what they eat. The study also found that 57% of Indians claim they consume only organic food—a number which is much higher than Britain (12%) and Japan (13%) for example<sup>8</sup>. However, while they prefer organic food, Indians, both rural and urban, consume more carbohydrates and less protein than recommended.

A study by the EAT-Lancet Commission<sup>9</sup> found that rural and urban Indians consumed 432 grams and 347 grams of carbohydrates daily against the recommended 282 grams. Similarly, rural and urban Indians consume a much smaller quantity of protein—194 and 242 grams daily instead of the recommended 459 grams.

**Do you believe a nutritious diet is essential for leading a healthy life?**

98%



Agree



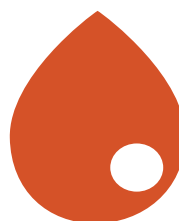
Figure 1

“A study by the EAT-Lancet Commission found that rural and urban Indians consumed 432 grams and 347 grams of carbohydrates daily against the recommended 282 grams. Similarly, rural and urban Indians consume a much smaller quantity of protein—194 and 242 grams daily instead of the recommended 459 grams.”

## High levels of nutrition awareness

Our study indicates that never before have customers been more aware of the impact their diet has on an individual’s health. For instance, virtually all respondents (98%) agree that a nutritious diet is essential for a healthy lifestyle (Figure 1). Nearly three quarters of the respondents (73%) understand the connection between healthy eating and losing weight, and 97% are aware of the essential nutrients and micro-nutrients required for their body (Figure2).

**Are you aware of the nutrients or micro nutrients required for your body?**



97%



Aware

Figure 2

# The action gap

Despite such awareness, our research reveals a gap when it comes to making the necessary changes to their diet. 60% of the respondents 'rarely' or 'never' make a conscious effort to add nutritive elements or additional supplements to their diet (Figure 3) and 38% of the respondents claimed they 'rarely' or 'never' specifically seek seasonal fruits or vegetables that can add to the nutritional quality of their diet (Figure 4).

## How often do you make conscious effort to include nutritive elements or additional supplements to your diet?

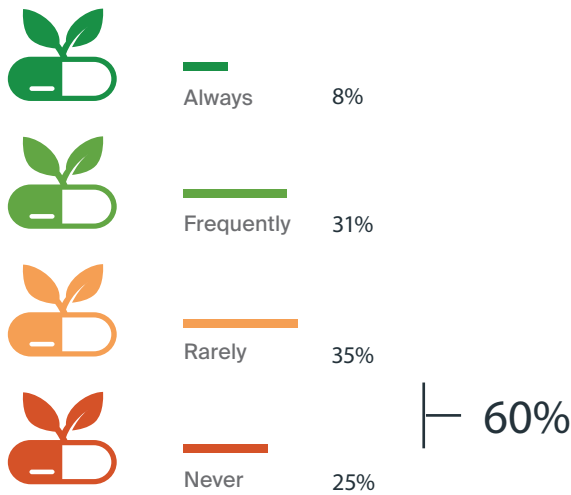


Figure 3

## Do you specifically look for the seasonal supply of fruits or vegetables that add to your nutritional requirement?

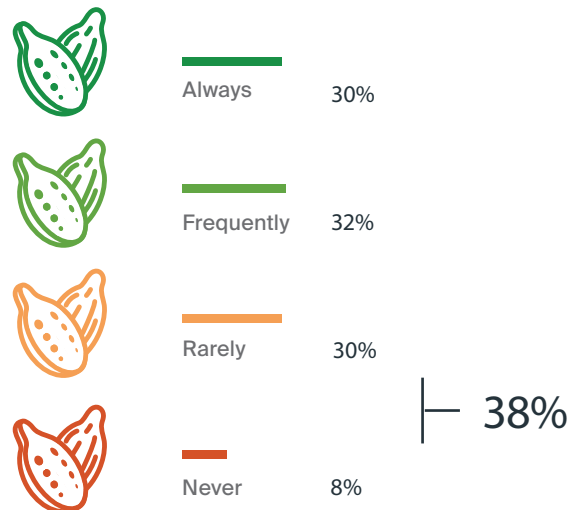


Figure 4

In fact, of all the respondents aware of the required quantity of nutrition in their diet, a large number admit to falling short in the consumption of the same.

For instance, 57% claim that they did not consume dairy or milk products and more than half (55%) admit that they did not consume leafy vegetables in the required quantity (Figure 5).

# Causes of the 'Diet Paradox'

According to our study one reason for the existing gap between high awareness levels of eating healthy and the lack of equivalent action is regular skipping of meals. An overwhelming 84% of the respondents admitted to skipping meals. 46% claimed that they would forgo a meal because of an important work meeting (Figure 6) and 42% of the respondents claimed that they 'rarely' or 'never' eat healthy or nutritious dishes cooked at home during festivals (Figure 7).

## Did you consume the following nutritive elements yesterday in the required quantity?

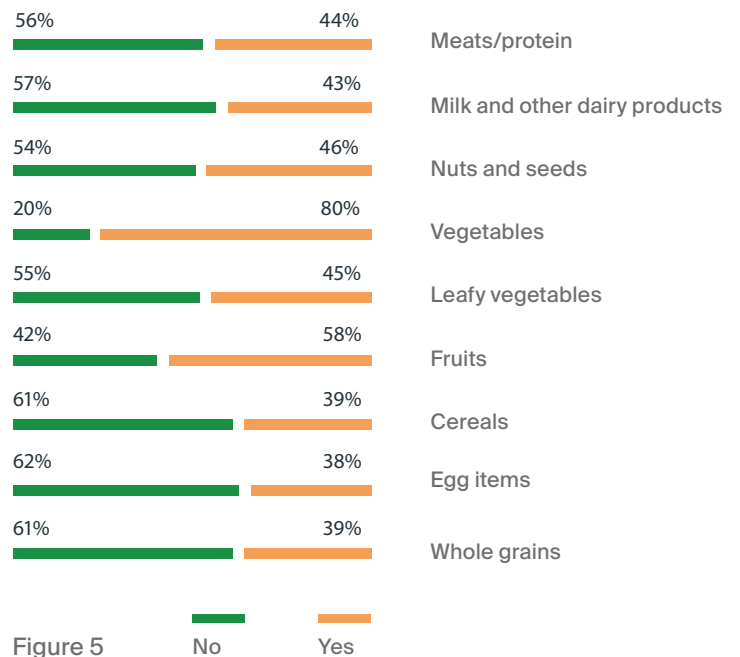


Figure 5

Furthermore, nearly a **third** consider work timings (31%) the top barrier to lead a healthy life, while more than **one-in-five** respondents (22%) consider it to be the family (Figure 8). In fact, **62%** of the respondents claimed it is 'extremely difficult' or 'difficult' to influence their family members to eat a healthy diet (Figure 9).

Another reason for the existing gap may be the lack of readily available and affordable nutritious food. While some nutritional products may not easily available or affordable, products like fortified rice, wheat, atta, and salt can also assist with bridging the gap between awareness and action and meet nutritional goals.

### How likely are you to forgo your meal because of an important work meeting?

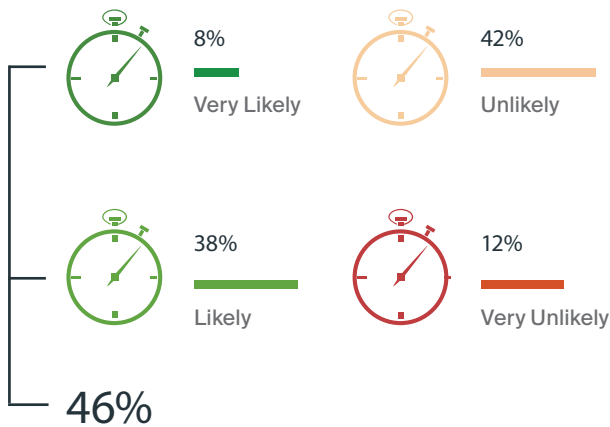


Figure 6

### During a festival or a special occasion amongst all the dishes cooked at home, how often would you select and eat healthy or nutritive dishes?

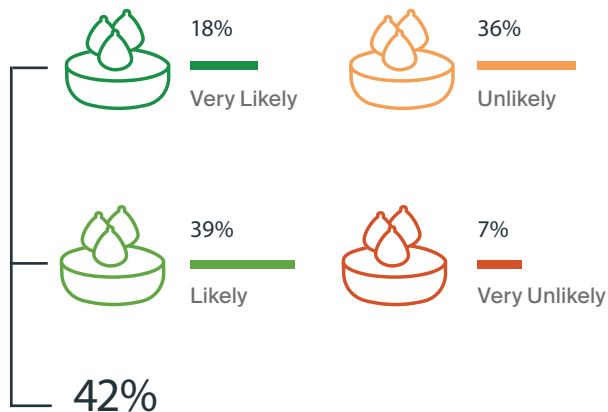


Figure 7

For example, rice, wheat, and their atta are staple products in nearly every Indian home; and these can be easily upgraded to a healthier version by adding simple micro-nutrient mixes.

Further, the existing gap resulting in India's 'Diet Paradox' can only be eliminated by a holistic approach, when the significance of adequate nutrition, regular sleep, and exercise gets translated into concrete actionable steps.

### What do you consider the top barrier to lead a healthy life?

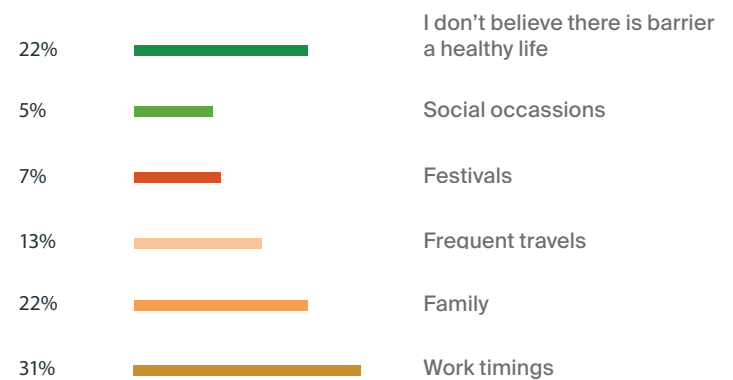


Figure 8

### Do you find it difficult to influence your family members to eat a balanced diet?

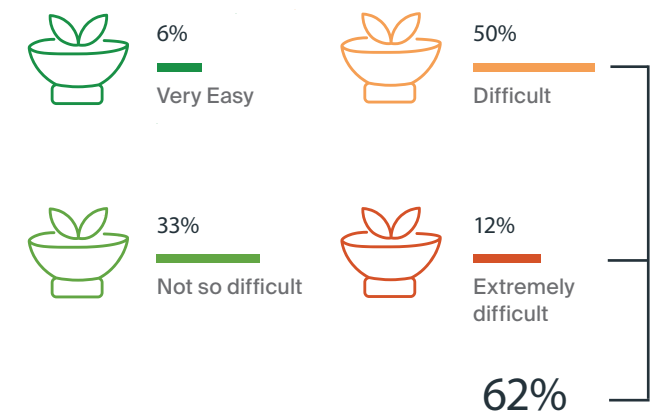


Figure 9



# Chapter 2:

## Demographic Analysis



## Diet Paradox across the ages

Indians have always had a special passion for food. According to a survey by Godrej Appliances on 'Fridge Logic', 53% of the respondents are classified as 'Fridge Obsessive' and claim to know the precise contents of their household fridge<sup>10</sup>. Another study by Facebook indicates that 'food and drink' (43%) is one of the top three interests pursued by Instagram users<sup>11</sup>. The same study stated that 'health and fitness' was also pursued by more than a third (35%) of Instagram users<sup>12</sup>.

Our own study demonstrated similar results in terms of awareness; however, the high levels of awareness were often juxtaposed with a lack of action towards maintaining a strict diet regime. In addition, some differences emerged among the various demographics and their behaviour towards a healthy and nutritive diet. In fact, our findings indicated that higher the awareness levels the greater the reluctance to take adequate action.

### Do you believe a nutritious diet is essential for leading a healthy life?

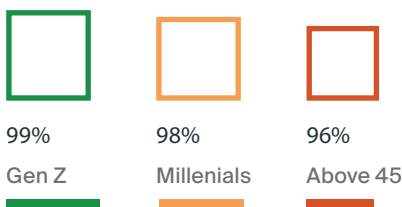


Figure 10

“According to a study by Facebook, ‘health and fitness’ was also pursued by more than a third (35%) of Instagram user.”

## Young, aware, and nutrition-deficient

Gen Z most considers a nutritious diet essential for leading a healthy lifestyle (99%) compared to 98% of millennials and 96% of those above 45 (Figure 10). 79% of millennials and 70% of Gen Z know the connection between healthy eating and losing weight compared to only 67% of those over 45. However, 82% of those between 36 and 45 claim that the food they are eating has all the nutrition in it compared to only 76% of Gen Z and 80% millennials (Figure 11).

### Do you think that the food that you are currently consuming has all the nutrition in it?

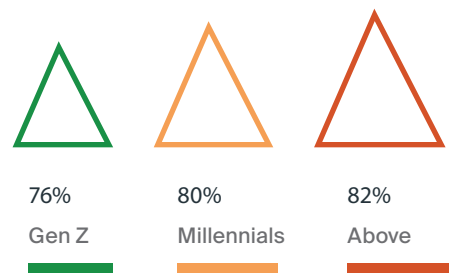


Figure 11

## The Gen X attitude of skipping meals

According to our research, 89% of Gen X respondents, those between 36 and 45, admit to skipping meals compared to only 77% of Gen Z and 84% of millennials (Figure 12). More than half (56%) of Gen X admit to skipping a meal for an important work meeting compared to only 45% of Gen Z. Of all the age groups, millennials are the least likely (41%) to skip a meal for an important work meeting (Figure 13).

### How often do you skip meals?

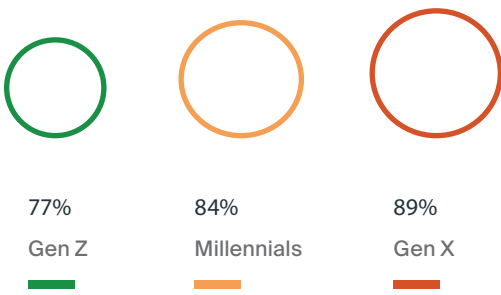


Figure 12

### How likely are you to forgo your meal because of an important work meeting?

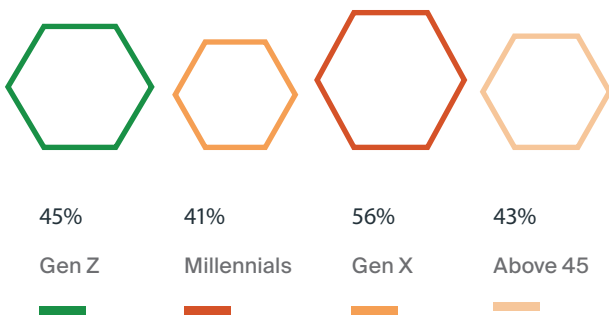


Figure 13

## Barriers to a healthy and nutritious life

The healthy tradition of eating three full square meals a day is no more the gospel. The changing lifestyles and behavioral patterns have resulted in relatively unhealthy dietary habits. Work timings seemed to hit the millennial cohort the hardest. Today, India has one of the largest millennial workforces amounting to 426 million<sup>13</sup>, and more than a third of millennials (36%) claim that work timings are the top barrier to a healthy life compared to 28% of those over 36 (Figure 14).

Family responsibilities are another barrier that contributes to the diet paradox. However, unlike work, the inclination to prioritise family responsibilities over an individual's diet rises with age. Several Gen Xers fall into what is

termed as the 'sandwich generation'—a population that has to deal with the dual responsibilities of taking care of their aging parents as well as their young children.

A 2019 survey<sup>14</sup> found that 89% of the Indian population aged between 35 years and 49 years were found to be suffering from some level of stress. Clearly, this stress is spilling over into their dietary habits as well.

While more than a quarter (26%) of those over 36 claim that family responsibilities are the top barrier to a healthy life, the number gradually decreases to one-in-five millennials (20%), and further to 17% of Gen Z respondents (Figure 14).

Other significant obstacles to consuming a healthy diet include frequent travels, festivals and social occasions for 29% of Gen Z, 21% millennials, and 26% of Gen X respondents. Festivals and special occasions are especially responsible for distancing individuals from healthy foods as 42% across the various age groups claimed that they 'rarely' or 'never' selected healthy or nutritive dishes cooked at home during festivals.

### What do you consider the top barrier to lead a healthy life?

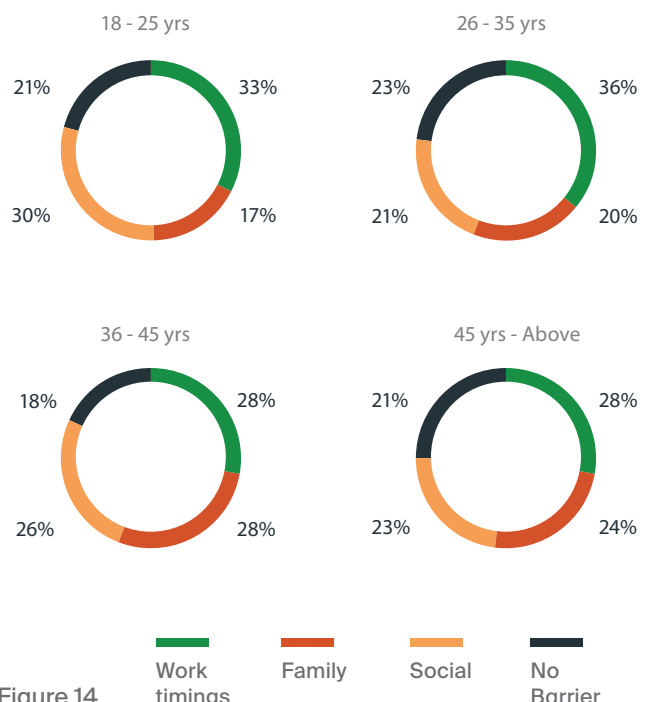


Figure 14



# Chapter 3:

## Gender Analysis

Never before have individuals been more aware of the impact their diet has on an individual's health. Both men and women equally agree (98%) that a nutritious diet is essential for leading a healthy lifestyle, however, women appear to be comparatively more conscious of the action required to maintain such a diet.

For instance, 57% of women claimed that the food they consume contains all the essential nutrients and micro-nutrients compared to only 53% of men. We also found that nearly a third of men (32%) have been prescribed nutritive supplements by a nutritionist or a doctor compared to only 18% women (Figure 15).

In fact, the data reveals 83% of women would prefer eating nutritious food while only 73% of men claim to do so (Figure 16).

Even though women believe in adopting a more proactive approach towards their diet and, in turn, their nutrition, the 'Diet Paradox' surfaces for both genders nationally. According to the National Family Health Survey<sup>15</sup>, less than half of women consume dark green, leafy vegetables (47%) and pulses or beans (45%) daily. Consumption of fruits is even rarer, as 54% of women do not consume fruits even once a week. The same study states, more than a quarter of men (25.6%) and 19.5% women consume aerated drinks weekly.

**In the past, how often have you been prescribed nutritive supplements by a nutritionist or a doctor?**

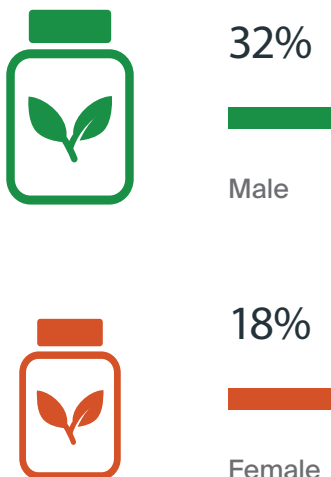


Figure 15

## The diet challenge

While both the genders are harmonious in their recalcitrant behaviour, their reasons for the deviation from their diet varies. Our findings suggest that the top challenge to their diet is 'work timings' for men (32%) and 'family responsibility' for women (30%). Nearly half (49%) of men admit to skipping meals for an important work meeting compared to 42% of women.

This trend is reversed in the matter of festivals, where the same proportion of women (49%) admit that they would 'rarely' or 'never' eat the healthier option amongst all the dishes cooked at home during a festival compared to only 39% men.

**Prefer to complement their regular food with higher nutrition rather than being prescribed multivitamins.**

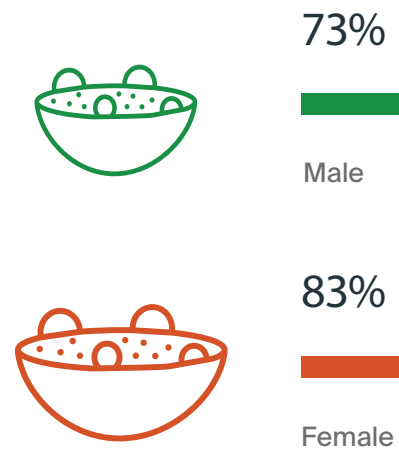


Figure 16



# Chapter 4:

The role of supplements

Micro-nutrients – vitamins and minerals – form an essential part of a balanced diet. Poor nutrition can negatively affect learning, development, productivity, physical and mental health, and family life.

A fast-paced lifestyle has reduced the will and time to cook at home. Erratic eating habits contribute to poor digestion, making it difficult for the body to extract necessary nutrients from food. Research by Wholehealth.com stated that over 90% of the population in India doesn't get the recommended amount of nutrients<sup>16</sup>. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4), 36% of Indian women consumed fried foods weekly and 54%, i.e. more than half of the population, did not eat fruits even once a week<sup>17</sup>.

“According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4), 36% of Indian women consumed fried foods weekly and 54%, i.e. more than half of the population, did not eat fruits even once a week.”

Such ‘Diet Paradox’ evident from our research findings suggest that even though 97% are aware of the essential nutrients and micro-nutrients required for their body, **one-in-five** respondents (20%) did not consume vegetables in the required quantity and **more than one-in-three** respondents (42%) did not consume fruits in the required quantity.

Dietary supplements are known to eliminate this paradox by providing the proper balance of nutrients as needed by a healthy body. It can also add to the nutrient density, making sure that the right amount of dietary nutrients is consumed. Supplements also address nutritional deficiencies specific to certain demographics, such as women and children.

For instance, Anemia, the most common form of micro-nutrient deficiency affects almost 50 to 60% of preschool children and women<sup>18</sup>, can be easily prevented with iron and folic acid supplements.

Over 18% of Indians are over 65<sup>19</sup> years of age and as nutrient absorption declines with age, supplements are the next best choice as it is easier to absorb. In the present scenario, the best available option is to include supplements and essentials for India's aged population.

While dietary supplements cannot replace a poor diet, it can help prevent the damage caused by poor eating habits. Dietary supplements increase disease protection by 83%, improve immune function by 42% and energy levels by 31%<sup>20</sup>. Nu-Shakti has developed products like daily home fortifiers for staple foods like rice, wheat, and their atta, micro-nutrient powders to support better nutrition for Indians in both urban and rural areas.

According to Alok Kohli, Business Director – DSM India, “While the rise in education and technology that has led to better lifestyles in India especially urban India, this awareness has not necessarily translated into positive action—especially when it comes to eating a balanced diet. Nu-Shakti's supplements such as ‘Powermix for atta’ and ‘MixMe Powdered Beverage’ represent an extremely practical way to address the ‘Diet Paradox’. These products help people of all ages put the undoubted knowledge they have of good nutrition, into action.”

“Dietary supplements increase disease protection by 83%, improve immune function by 42% and energy levels by 31%.”

# Research methodology

The report is based on face-to-face interviews conducted by Innovative Research Services (India) Pvt. Ltd., with over 1,011 Indians of all ages across Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, and Kolkata between February/ March 2020, and is supported by extensive desk research.

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