

## Food Habits and Its Effect on Health of Elders in Magar Community

✍ Bhawani Prasad Acharya

### Abstract

*The prime objective of the paper is to find out the situation of food habit and its impact on health of elderly people. This study was conducted in Magar community of Lekhparsa VDC of Surkhet district. The study was based on descriptive research design. Only elderly magar people were the population of the study. There were 220 elderly Magar people among them. 50 percent elderly magar were taken as a sample by using lottery method of random sampling. The structured interview schedule was used to collect the necessary data. It was found that, among the elderly aged people, aged 60 to 64 were highest in number. Majority of respondents eat dal- tarkari (56.37%) with bhat. Maximum respondents did not eat vegetables (sag) with meal. Half of the respondents (50%) take meal thrice a day, cleaning way of fruits and water processing is not so satisfactory. Most of the respondents took meat and alcoholic drinks in their main festivals. In total of 110 respondents, majority of respondents were suffered from abdominal pain and blood pressure. This study concluded that the food habit of elderly Magar people was not found satisfactory and due to poor and unhygienic health habit majority of the respondents suffered from gastro-intestinal problems.*

**Key words:** Food habit, nutritional disorder, malnutrition, over nutrient, festival *etc.*

### Introduction

Nutrition is an input and foundation for health and development. Interaction of infection and malnutrition is well-documented. Better nutrition means stronger immune systems, less illness and better health. Healthy children learn better. Healthy people are stronger, more productive and more able to create opportunities to break gradually the cycles of both poverty and hunger in a sustainable way. Better nutrition is a prime entry point to end poverty and a milestone to achieve better quality of life (WHO, 2011).

Poor nutritional status is a primary concern for the elderly. They are more susceptible to nutritional disorders because of age-related changes and the increased prevalence of disease. Ageing is associated with a decline in energy expenditure, which is often accompanied by a reduction in food intake. Also, aged people are likely to be taking multiple medications and are susceptible to particular psychological and social problems, all of which can influence nutrition.

Nutrient deficiencies appear to be increased with age. Unintentional weight loss and malnutrition are common problems in the elderly. Taste and smell changes, as well as feelings of loneliness and depression, contribute to decreased appetite, while many elderly people may eat less because of chewing difficulties, fatigue, and social reasons. If bones decrease in density, then osteoporosis (bone loss) develops over time. Bone degeneration is due not only to calcium deficiency but also partly to genetics. These changes can contribute to decreased food intake, unintentional weight loss and malnutrition.

Food habit refers to the way, which different people select, cook, serve and eat food that are available to them. The term habits (food habits) refers to why and how people eat, which food they eat and with whom they eat, as well as the ways they apply to take their foods. Food habit is the area of knowledge regarding the role of food in the maintenance of good health. Thus, food habit is the study of food at work in our body. Food habits is

one key to develop and maintain a state of health that is optimal for the people. In addition, a poor diet coupled with a sedentary lifestyle is known to be risk factors for life-threatening chronic diseases and death. Heart disease, stroke, hypertension, diabetes and some forms of cancer are the diseases which account for two-thirds of all deaths in the United States. The major health problems in the United States are largely caused by excessive energy intake and not enough physical activities (American Medical Association, 1974).

Food is an important aspect in health habit. The main concern in the elderly is the reported decline in food intake and the loss of the motivation to eat. This suggests the presence of problems associated with the regulation of energy balance and the control of food intake. An increasing understanding of the factors that contribute to poor nutrition in the elderly should enable the development of appropriate preventive and treatment strategies and improve the health of older people (Donini and Savina, 2010).

The total population of Magars in Nepal is 18,87,733. The population of Magar residing in urban areas is 2,32,892 that of rural area is 16,54,841 and that in Mountain region is 27,783, in Hilly region is 13,24,528 and in Terai region is 535,425. According to Development Region, the population of Magar in Mid Western development region is 484,771. The elderly population of Magar in Nepal is 11,533 whereas the male population is 8,793 and that of female is 2,740 (CBS, 2012).

The study site for this study is Lekhparsa VDC of Surkhet district. The total population of this VDC is 6593. The Magars of Lekhparsa are backward in every sector like education, development and health. Their food habits are also very poor. The life style of the elderly people of the VDC is not good. In the context of this VDC, due to lack of family care, they are forced to live a miserable life. On the other hand the elderly people are neglected in the family and society. They have to depend on their sons for food, clothes and living which cause

different problems on health. The food habits of elderly people depend on caste, culture, religion and society. Lack of knowledge on food habits is also one of the factors of poor health. Elderly people are considered to be the forwarders for any nation. The food habit and health has a close relation. If the people take balance diet according to their work and age it helps them being healthy. Health of elder people depends upon their food habit. Magar is a ethnic group having own culture and tradition. These cultures and traditions affect the habit of food consuming. This paper tries to find out the existing situation of daily food habit and its effects on the health of elderly people in Magar community.

### Methodology

The study was based on descriptive type of research design and it was quantitative in nature.

All the elderly people of Magar community living in Lekhparsa VDC were considered as total population of the study. There were 220 elderly Magar live in Lekhparsa VDC of Surkhet among them, 50 percent (110) of the population taken as a sample by using random sampling method of lottery method. In this study structured interview schedule was used as a main tool for collecting data. Researcher met the selected elderly magar people and collect necessary data by using structured interview schedule.

### Analysis and Interpretation of Data

The analysis and interpretation of data is done on the following headings.

#### 1. Age Composition

According to CBS (2012) only 8.13 percent of the populations are estimated to be more than aged 60 years. Only 8.13 percent of the populations are estimated to be more than aged 60 years and above, whereas 56.96 percent of the population is between 15 and 59 years, and 34.91 percent is estimated at younger than 14 years (CBS, 2012). The table 1 shows the age group of respondents of the study area. Out of 110 Respondents, a higher proportion

of the respondents (37.27 percent) were in the age group of 60-64 years. 26.36 percent in the group 65-69 years, 19.10 percent in 70-72 years and 17.27 percent in the age group of above 75 years.

**Table 1: Distribution of the Respondents by Age**

S.N.	Age Group	No. of Respondents	Percent
1.	60-64 years	41	37.27
2.	65-69 years	29	26.36
3.	70-74 years	21	19.10
4.	75 years above	19	17.27
<b>Total</b>		<b>110</b>	<b>100.00</b>

A higher proportion of the population of the study areas were between the age of 60 to 64 years, and few proportion of the population of the study areas were 75 years above. A higher proportion of the populations of the study area were between the ages of 60 to 64 years which is slightly higher than that of the national data.

## 2. Educational Status

In Nepal, there are marked disparities in literacy rates as 75.1 percent males are literate as compared to 57.4 percent of females. According to CBS (2012), only 65.9 percent of the Nepalese people are literate. Among them, only 57.4 percent of adult females are literate whereas the literacy rate of females in the study area is fewer than that of the national data.

**Table 3: Classification of the Respondents by Education Status**

S.N.	Education status	No. of respondents	Percent
1.	Illiterate	60	54.55
2.	Literate	30	27.27
3.	Primary	10	09.09
4.	Lower secondary	6	05.45
5.	Secondary	3	02.72
6.	Higher	1	00.90
<b>Total</b>		<b>110</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The table 3 shows that more respondents (54.55 percent) were illiterate in the study area, similarly,

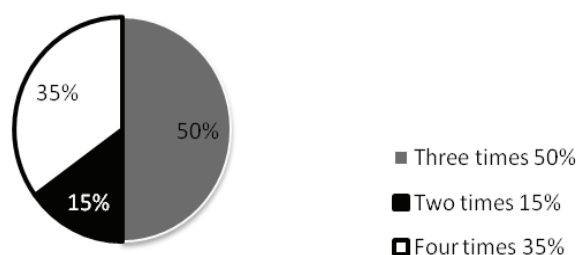
27.27 percent were literate and a few of them (09.00 percent) were primary level educated. Likewise, a few of them were of lower secondary 5.45 percent. 2.72 percent were secondary and only 00.90 percent were higher level educated. Whereas, the literacy rate of male and female in the study area was fewer than that of the national data.

## 3. Food habits

Food is an important aspect in health habit. The main concern in the elderly is the reported decline in food intake and the loss of the motivation to eat. This suggests the presence of problems associated with the regulation of energy balance and the control of food intake. An increasing understanding of the factors that contribute to poor nutrition in the elderly should enable the development of appropriate preventive and treatment strategies and improve the health of older people.

## 4. Times of Food Eaten

Figure 1 shows that out of 110 respondents 15 percentage were found to have food twice a day, 50 percentage thrice a day and 35 percentage four times a day. Generally a few had their food especially in the morning and evening because of poverty, however, some of them told the researcher that they have their food thrice a day.



**Figure 1: Times of Food Eaten**

Respondents who took food 3 times a day, especially they had their meal in morning, Khaja in the afternoon and dinner in the evening. They didn't take breakfast in the morning. It is their habitual trend only 35 percentages were found to have their food up to four times a day. The number of respondents having food thrice a day is high. It is better to have food thrice a day. Some of them who had their meal 4 times a day were found obese (Fat).

### 5. Frequency of Green Vegetables (Sag) Used

For the desired study, respondents were asked about their degree of green vegetable, taken in their meals. The table (4) shows that 78.19 percentages had green vegetable (sag) once, a week, 16.36 percentages every two days and 5.45 percentage had daily percent of respondents using green vegetable once a week is high and using daily is low, 5.45 percentage had daily because they could buy vegetables even from out. They can also grow. And they were more conscious about their health as well as they had their own enough land. The other 16.36 percentage was also from middle class family so they had vegetables at list in every 2 days. And the remaining 78.19 percentage was having that once a week.

**Table 4: Distribution of the Elders by Their Frequency of Green Vegetable (Sag Used)**

S.N.	Frequency of Green vegetable (sag used)	No.of respondent	Percent
1.	Daily	6	05.45
2.	every 2 days	18	16.36
3.	Once a week	86	78.19
<b>Total</b>		<b>110</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Because of lack of land and laziness as well though some of them had land. So, they were unable to have green vegetable timely. Taking sag daily or in every 2 days is very good habit.

### 6. Frequency of Meat

Meat is necessary for the fulfillment of protein and vitamin however some other things can be used as complementary food besides meat i.e. fruits, vegetable etc. Form the table 5 a total of 36.36 percentage of elders out of 110 respondents had meat in more than twice a weeks, 27.27 percentage once a week and 4.55 percentage daily

**Table 5: Distribution of Respondents Time of Meat Eaten**

S. N.	Times	No. of respondents	Percent
1.	Daily	5	04.55
2.	Once a week	30	27.27
3.	Twice a week	40	36.36
4.	More than weeks	35	31.82
<b>Total</b>		<b>110</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The table shows that the percent of respondent having meat in more than twice a week is high and the percent having meat almost daily is low. It can supply protein and vitamin to our body which is essential. The lack of meat can supply the elements to our body. Besides meat some other things like fruits can supply protein and vitamin as alternative food.

### 7. Duration of Fruits Eating Habit

The table 6 shows that the high (63.63 Percent) percent of respondents used to have monthly though knowing its benefits, 30 percentage were found to be using fruits fortnightly. 4.55 percentages were weekly and only 1.82 percentage were daily users. From this table it is identified that the respondents using fruits daily were a few and the large number of respondents didn't use fruits very often. It was 63.63 percentages.

**Table 6: Distribution of the Respondents Fruits Eaten**

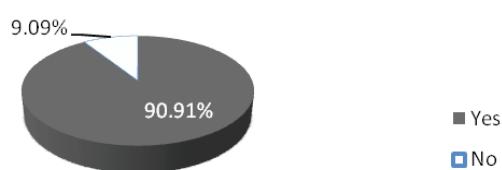
S.N.	Duration	No. of respondents	Percent
1.	Daily	2	01.82
2.	Weekly	5	04.55
3.	Monthly	70	63.63
4.	Fortnightly	33	30.00
<b>Total</b>		<b>110</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The above mentioned fruits requirement in daily life is necessary. According to the table, the majority of respondents didn't have fruits timely because lack of poverty and knowledge. So they had to better take fruits daily. Otherwise it might cause various nutrition problems.



### 8. Food Habits During Feast and Festival

The main festivals of Magar people are maghe sankranti, Loshar, Dashain and Tihar. But in the study area, the magars celebrate Dashain, Tihar, Maghe Sakranti, and women celebrates Tij also. Both the males and, females worship and recycle during these festivals. They prepare different types of dishes in these festivals. Mainly selroti, fruits, alcohol, and meat. They eat more meat on the occasions due to alcohol.



**Figure 2: Distribution of the Respondents by Meat Eaten During Festival**

In the widely celebrated festivals 90.91 percentages had meat and only 9.09 percentage didn't have meat during the festival. The majority of respondents having meat were male. Males were found to have meat more than women. Except, meat, different kinds of food eg, Roti, Chiura and some Greasy food were prepared during the festival. The male who has light works needs 30g meat and who has hard works need 55g of meat per day. The hot and greasy meat can cause digestive problem, gastrointestinal problems etc. Besides this, they were found eating meat more than enough during festival. Normally 30g meat for male and 55g for female is needed. But they were found eating meat more than requirement in festival. This could have negative effect on health.

### 9. Taking Alcoholic Drink During Festival

Generally the people don't mind drinking alcohol during festivals. That's why many people can be found using much more alcoholic drinks while they are celebrating festivals. The researcher kept on asking questions about the use of meat and alcoholic drinks.



**Figure 3: Distribution of the Respondent by Taking Alcoholic Drink During Festival**

The figure 3 shows that 72.73 percentage respondents were found to be using alcoholic drinks during festivals. 27.27 percentage respondents were not found to be using alcoholic drinks during festivals. Alcohol was used by majority of respondents during the feast and festivals. They usually drink homemade wine, sealed bottle wine and Jannd. But they usually drink homemade alcohol. Whatever is their tradition, it may affect on their health badly. The regular use of alcoholic drinks could have long term effect on health. So alcohol should be out of their reach.

### 10. Varieties of Food Used Daily

When researcher got some information about the times of their food eaten, researcher was eager meaning to know more information about the varieties of food which they used daily, so the researcher questioned them what else they used for meal daily. The information is given in table 7.

**Table 7: Distribution of the Elders by Their Varieties of Food**

S.N.	Varieties of food	No. of respondents	Percent
1.	Dal-Bhat	20	18.18
2.	Bhat -Tarkari	18	16.36
3.	Both (Dal-Bhat and Tarkari)	62	56.37
4.	Other	10	09.09
<b>Total</b>		<b>110</b>	<b>100.00</b>

According to table nun. 7, out of 110 elders, 18.08 percent had Dal in their meal, 16.36 percent had Tarkari and 36.37 percent had Both and 9.09 percent were found to have other else. The percent of elders using only other and using both Dal and Tarkari is

high. Generally their usual common food was Dal, Rice and Tarkari. The percent of elders who had only Dal or tarkari in their meal was because of their low economic status. They may be faced Health problems. And 9.09 percent used to have other foods, i.e. curry, pickle egg, milk, meat etc in their meal.

The above data revealed that most of the elderly people eat dal-bhat and tarkari as their main food as it is the common food of all Nepali people.

### 11. Effects of Food Habits on Health

The surrounding should be kept fresh and pollution free. Surrounding is not the single causes of diseases so an adequate care of health is necessary. Food habits should be good and appropriate. Table 8 shows that out of the total respondents, 9.09 percent had faced the problem of diarrhea but 90.91 percent had never faced such problems. 4.64 percent had faced the problems of vomiting. But 95.45 had never faced such problems. 43.64 percent had faced the problems of abdomen pain but 56.36 percent had never faced such problems. 13.64 percent had faced Diabetes. 86.36 percent had never faced such problems. Similarly 59.09 percent had faced blood pressure. 40.91 percent had never faced such problems. 18.18 percent had faced digestive problem whereas 81.82 percent had never faced this problem.

**Table 8: Number of Respondents Suffering from Disease**

S. N.	Disease	No. of Respondents				
		Faced	Percent	Didn't face	Percent	Total
1.	Diarrhea	10	09.09	100	90.91	110
2.	Vomiting	5	04.64	105	95.45	110
3.	Abdomen pain	48	43.64	62	56.36	110
4.	Diabetes	15	13.64	95	86.36	110
5.	High/low blood pressure	65	59.09	45	40.91	110
6.	Digestive problem	20	18.18	90	81.82	110

Health problems stated above are common in the elderly people in the study area, The problems,

high/low blood pressure, abdomen pain, digestive problem etc were found to be common which relevant among the elderly people.

### Conclusion

This study was conducted in Lekhparsa VDC of Surkhet district to find out food habits of elderly people. In the study area, the elderly people were of the ages above 60 years which were both male and female but the percentage of female was more than that of the male, literacy rate was also low in the study area as more than half of the respondents were illiterate. The respondents having their meal thrice a day were high and generally Dal and tarkari were found to be used by majority of respondents. The number of respondents using 'Sag' was very low and majorities were not found to have sag in their meal particularly because of lack of knowledge.. The use of fruits by the majority was not satisfactory. It was almost monthly. Generally many people eat fruits without washing, only few of them wash before eating.

During festival, the majority of respondents had meat. Only few of them did not have meat. Alcoholic drinks were also found to be used during festivals by many respondents. The study comes to the conclusion that physical health problems were affecting the elderly people but some of the respondents had never faced such problem. Diarrhea, vomiting, abdominal pain, diabetes, high/low blood pressure, digestive problem were common in the study area. High/low blood pressure was seen on more than half percent. Abdominal pain, diarrhea, vomiting, diabetes were also seen in some of them. It was because of their negligence about surrounding environment and illiteracy and poor food habit practices.

#### About the author

Mr. Acharya born in 2032/04/05 in Chhinchu VDC-6, Surkhet, is working at Surkhet Campus (Education) since 10 years. He is Teaching Assistant of Health and Physical Education. He has published many articles. He is interested in research writing, research activities and applying the findings in teaching.

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