

SOUTH ASIA

South Asia is a subregion of Asia consisting of India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bhutan, Afghanistan and the Maldives. About one-fourth of the world's population resides in South Asia, making it the most densely populated geographical region in the world. This area is diverse in culture, language, religion, and socio-economic status. The two major religions of South Asia are Hinduism and Islam, although Sikhism, Jainism and Christianity are also practiced in the region.



Common Nutritional Approaches

The enjoyment of traditional cuisines plays an integral role in community and family life in South Asia. Dietary patterns in this region are typically high in saturated and partially hydrogenated fats from ghee, coconut products, palm oil and partially hydrogenated vegetable oils, and refined carbohydrates. In this area, there tends to be an overconsumption of staples (i.e., rice) and oils and an underconsumption of fruits, vegetables, and protein foods.

Common carbohydrate sources include lentils, rice, flat bread, starchy vegetables, and other grains. Religious traditions often determine the choice of protein sources. Pork consumption is forbidden by Islam, and beef is not consumed by the Hindus. Many individuals in South Asia follow a vegan or vegetarian diet, which can be low in protein and high in carbohydrates. Fried snacks and sugar desserts are widely enjoyed and increase carbohydrate intake in the region. Predominate protein sources are goat, lamb, poultry, seafood, dairy products, beans and nuts. The South Asian diet is flavored with a variety of spices, some of which have medicinal properties.



Practical Tips and Substitutions for Eating Healthy

- ➔ Limit fried foods high in carbohydrates and fats such as Samosas, pakoras, chevadas, plantain chips, spring rolls and egg rolls. Convert deep frying recipes to oven-baked recipes.
- ➔ Substitute refined grains with whole grains such as brown rice, quinoa, millets, or whole grain flat bread.
- ➔ Limit desserts to special occasions. Limit desserts like halwa, Gulab jamun, cookies, cakes, pies, puddings, jalebi, pheerni, burfi and rasmalai.
- ➔ Eat fruits as desserts. Eat low-sugar fruits such as berries instead of high-sugar fruits like grapes, mangoes, pineapples, and bananas. A size of a tennis ball is the ideal portion for a fruit serving. Avoid juices and sugar-sweetened beverages.
- ➔ Increase intake of non-starchy vegetables, such as cauliflower, eggplant, okra, broccoli, carrots, leafy greens, celery, tomato, or summer squash.
- ➔ Include fermented foods like low-fat plain yogurt, low-fat Greek yogurt, lassi, buttermilk, pickled vegetables, ikli, and dosa, which can be good for maintaining gut health.
- ➔ Choose healthy, naturally-occurring fat in small amounts for improving satiety. Avoid artificially-made fats like Vanaspati. Due to high saturated fat, use ghee and coconut oil in small amounts not more than 1-2 teaspoons per day. Cook with minimal amounts of oil. Use tomato-based sauces instead of creamy sauces and dressings.



Healthful Eating Plan & Meal Ideas

Breakfast Ideas

- 1 cup steel cut oats with 1/2 cup of low-fat milk
- 2 Idli (savory rice cake) with sambar
- 1 cup Upma (traditional South Indian breakfast dish made from roasted rava) with tomato or mint chutney
- 2 eggs with vegetables
- 1 fresh fruit, tea or coffee with low-fat milk

Lunch/Dinner Ideas

- 1/2 cup cooked brown rice or 2 small whole wheat Roti
- 3 cups of vegetables cooked with Indian spices
- 1 cup of legume or dal or 3 oz. fish or chicken
- 1/2 cup low-fat plain yogurt or buttermilk
- 2 Dosa with chutney, 1/2 cup yogurt
- 2 small Pulka roti with 1 cup vegetable curry



Clinical Pearls

- ✓ Emphasize balanced meals with adequate protein, fat, carbohydrates and plenty of fiber.
- ✓ Use home-cooked whole food options more often than processed, commercially-made foods.
- ✓ Limit carbohydrate intake and limit sweets.
- ✓ Practice portion control and refer to serving size regularly.
- ✓ Keep 30 minutes of physical activity as part of daily routine.

References:

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