

Editorial: Changes in eating habits, nutrition trends, and lifestyle-associated factors in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic

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We are living in unprecedented times. The COVID-19 pandemic, from its onset in late 2019, can be regarded as a transformative period in terms of changes it brought about in the lives of people worldwide, in particular, in the context of food, nutrition, and health. Widespread disruptions of food systems, instigated by logistical restrictions amid fears of spread of infection led to impairment of supply chains, and potential shortages of food (Galanakis, 2020). Moreover, partial, or complete lockdown procedures led to closures of establishments such as restaurants and hotels, schools, universities, and workplaces, as well as travel restrictions, changed the way the people gained access to food, as well as how, and where the food was prepared (Janssen et al., 2021). Additionally, many COVID-19-associated psychological factors could have significantly influenced dietary behaviors, in particular, in people staying at home owing to a variety of reasons including work-from-home, digital education, and even self-isolation (Bennett et al., 2021).

Frequent and extensive communication related to risk factors associated with COVID-19 might also have induced emotional stress, resulting in overconsumption, especially of the so-called “comfort foods,” for instance, chocolate, snacks, and chips, essentially processed foods rich in sugar and calories, a phenomenon that can be termed as “food craving,” or “emotional eating” (Salazar-Fernández et al., 2021). The metabolic impact of these high glycemic index foods, in turn, presents additional health risks, such as obesity and cardiovascular diseases beyond the chronic state of inflammation, increasing the risk for more severe complications associated with COVID-19 (Di Renzo et al., 2020). This is particularly significant in the context that obesity-associated conditions have the potential to impair immune responses, predisposing severely obese individuals to higher risks of COVID-19-associated complications. These complications potentially further hampered the ability of individuals to maintain a healthier lifestyle, involving healthy, varied diets, coupled with adequate physical activity levels.

Conversely, negative experiences stemming from confinement at home may also culminate in restricted eating habits, which can be attributed to physiological stress reactions mimicking the internal sensations linked with feeding-induced satiety (Yang et al. 2022). Finally, home confinement significantly increased the likelihood of sedentary behaviors, such as low physical activity levels (associated with both body fat and diet dysregulation), smoking, and sleep disturbances, further exacerbating anxiety and stress-induced behaviors (Dietz & Santos-Burgoa 2020).

Given that the restrictions related to COVID-19 have eased considerably, it is time to get our dietary behaviors back on track. We urge our readers to observe healthy eating habits and make appropriate adjustments to lifestyles, ensuring prolonged health benefits and longevity. It is also high time to take lessons from this pandemic and make our food systems much more resilient, effective, and inclusive with increased access to more susceptible and vulnerable demographics of our population, preventing a repeat of the “dominos effect” these disrupted food systems created in the context of health and disease.

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