

Micronutrient Enriched Food Ingredients –An Easy Way to Stay Healthy

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Received: February 21, 2015; **Published:** February 12, 2018

Food that we eat may satisfy our basic hunger but it may still lack something that is needed by our body to achieve a healthy and active life. These are micronutrients or the minerals and vitamins. These are needed daily in very small amounts – in micrograms or in milligrams. Hence they are called “micro” nutrients. Lack of micronutrients in the daily diet often goes unnoticed, as their absence does not lead to ‘hunger’. But it causes immense damage as they adversely impact our health and vitality in all stages of life.

Deficiencies in essential micronutrients such as iron, zinc, vitamin A and B are widespread among populations in the developing world and make individuals and families suffer serious consequences that include a range of diseases.

Iron deficiency reduces mental development and work performance. Some of the anemia symptoms include weakness and tiredness, pale look, short breaths, headache, trouble in concentrating. Women are at greater risk of anemia comparatively.

Severe Vitamin A deficiency (VAD) not only affects vision but also lowers the body immunity resulting in higher incidence of diarrhea, measles, malaria and death. In India, more than 57% of children suffer from sub-clinical Vitamin-A deficiency and 65.3 % of pre-school age children suffer from one or more symptoms of deficiency.

Similarly, Vitamin D deficiency has become a pandemic with about 1 billion people all over the world having low levels of vitamin D. This deficiency has been associated with rickets, increased risk of death from cardiovascular disease, severe asthma in children and Cancer.

Micronutrient deficiency malnutrition is more common in India than in Sub-Saharan Africa. One in every three malnourished children in the world lives in India. The three main approaches to addressing micronutrient deficiencies are fortification, supplementation, and dietary diversification. Fortification of foods with micronutrients is an excellent medium to long term approach. Food fortification means adding micronutrients (Vitamins and trace elements) to increase the micronutrient content of foods or to replace nutrients lost in food processing.

Food Fortification is cost effective and is done for foods which are consumed by mass, without disturbing color, taste and odor of the food. A range of food vehicles like wheat flour, rice, oil, milk, salt, sugar, seasoning powder, infants’ food are suitable for fortification. Iodized salt is actually iodine fortified salt.

Considering the scale of micronutrient deficiency diseases, Need of the hour is to start seeing the nutritional facts of a food on its label to check if the food is fortified or not and consume foods which are fortified with required essential micronutrients.

Volume 13 Issue 3 March 2018

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