STM JOURNALS

International Journal of
Nutritions

Volume 1, Issue 1, 2024
January–June
DOI (Journal): 10.37591/IJN

https://journals.stmjournals.com/ijn/

Review IJN

The Impact of Food Fortification on Health and Nutrition

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Abstract

This comprehensive study explores the critical role that food fortification plays in enhancing nutritional outcomes and overall health. Through an extensive review of existing literature, this article explores the diverse ways in which fortifying foods with essential nutrients positively influences public health. This analysis encompasses the benefits of fortification by addressing micronutrient deficiencies, promoting overall well-being, and preventing various health conditions. Food fortification is a pivotal intervention in the realm of public health nutrition, aiming to address nutrient deficiencies and enhance overall well-being. This analysis looks intently at the various methods that meals fortification impacts nutritional effects and typical fitness. By enriching commonly consumed foods with essential vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients, fortification strategies aim to fill gaps in dietary intake and improve nutritional status populations. The effectiveness of food fortification in tackling specific nutrient deficiencies has been extensively studied and validated. For example, fortification of salt with iodine has played a pivotal role in preventing iodine deficiency disorders, while fortifying staple grains with folic acid has significantly reduced the prevalence of neural tube defects. Moreover, fortification programs targeting iron, vitamin A, and other key nutrients have demonstrated positive impacts on maternal and child health, reducing the burden of anaemia and related complications. By facilitating access to micronutrients critical for growth, development, and disease prevention, fortification initiatives contribute to improved immune function, cognitive development, and overall quality of life. Additionally, fortification efforts have the potential to alleviate the burden of nutrition-related chronic diseases, such as osteoporosis and cardiovascular conditions, by ensuring adequate intake of key nutrients.

Keywords: Nutrients, Food Fortification, Micronutrient, Malnutrition, NAFDC

INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines food fortification as "the process of adding essential nutrients to food, whether naturally present or not, to address demonstrated deficiencies in the population or specific groups, with the aim of enhancing nutritional quality and preventing health issues. Furthermore, for a food product to be classified as fortified, it must contain a significant number of additional components capable of providing scientifically proven health benefits, such as reducing the risk of disease."

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Received Date: March 01, 2024
Accepted Date: March 13, 2024
Published Date: March 20, 2024

Citation: Thambidurai Bharath, Kandasamy Karthikeyan. The Impact of Food Fortificationon Health and Nutrition. International Journal of Nutritions. 2024; 1(1): 13–18p.

Food fortification plays a crucial role in preventing various nutritional deficiencies, including goiter, rickets, beriberi, and pellagra. Deficiencies in nutrients like folate can lead to neural tube abnormalities, while inadequate zinc intake may impair infant growth, and selenium deficiency is linked to cancer. These deficiencies have far-reaching effects, impacting both physical and mental health, thereby influencing labor productivity and overall economic parameters [1]. Commonly fortified food items include wheat and its products, corn, rice, milk and dairy products,

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salt, sugar, cooking oils, condiments, and breakfast cereals. These fortified foods serve as effective vehicles for delivering essential micronutrients, particularly in impoverished nations.

FOOD FORTIFICATION

Terms such as "food restoration," "food fortification," and "food enrichment" are interconnected concepts. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), food fortification involves adding one or more ingredients to food, regardless of whether they are naturally present, to prevent or address known deficiencies in the population or specific groups. Restoration refers to replenishing nutrients that may be lost during Good Manufacturing Process (GMP) or storage and handling procedures [2]. Enrichment, which is synonymous with fortification according to Codex General Principles, involves restoring lost vitamins and minerals during processing and can be considered interchangeable with fortification.

The process of adding essential nutrients to food, regardless of their natural occurrence, in order to prevent or treat documented deficiencies in the population or specific demographics, is known as fortification, as per the Codex General Principles for the Addition of Essential Nutrients to Foods [3].

Following these guidelines, the initial stage of any fortification program is to determine a demonstrated need to increase the intake of vital nutrients in particular demographic groups.

Clinical or subclinical evidence of deficiency, demonstrating inadequate levels of nutrient consumption or possible deficiencies resulting from changes in dietary practices, can be used to demonstrate this need.

FOOD FORTIFICATION IN INDIA

India, the second most populous country in the world with over 1.3 billion people, faces difficulties in spite of its quick economic expansion. Issues such as poverty, malnutrition, and inadequate public healthcare persist. The repercussions of malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies have an effect on a extensive segment of the population, making it a essential issue. While India has been engaged in food fortification efforts for some time, the publication of the Draft Food Safety & Standards (Fortification) regulation in 2016 marked a significant milestone. Subsequently, various government-funded initiatives have been launched to address micronutrient deficiencies and malnutrition among vulnerable groups.

Micronutrient deficiencies pose a threat to individuals of all ages, with young children and pregnant women being particularly vulnerable. For instance, over half of women aged 15–49, nearly a quarter of men in the same age group, and seven out of ten children aged 6–59 months suffer from anemia. This deficiency presents a serious health risk, especially among individuals with limited incomes and inadequate access to nutritious food. Many people do now not consume enough of the critical micronutrients due to the fact their food aren't properly-balanced or numerous [4].

As a response, state-wide fortification programs have been implemented under various government schemes, targeting staple dietary items like milk, rice, oil, and wheat flour.

FOOD FORTIFICATION–A SUSTAINABLE SOLUTION TO MALNUTRITION

The Codex General Principles on the Further Development of Important Nutrients in Foods provide guidance to competent national and/or regional bodies tasked with creating guidelines and legal frameworks for the safe and systematic addition of key nutrients to foods. These guidelines lay the foundation for a sensible and safe way to add necessary nutrients to food. In nations with low to moderate incomes, the fortification of micronutrients—including trace elements—can play a critical role in combating malnutrition.

Food fortification involves incorporating several essential components, such as:

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- *Disease prevention:* Food fortification aids in minimizing and preventing health risks associated with micronutrient deficiencies among the public and specific population groups.
- *Improved public health:* A reduction in the incidence of nutrient deficiencies is achieved by improving overall nutritional and health conditions through the fortification of regularly consumed foods.
- *Cost-effectiveness:* Fortifying food presents a cost-efficient means of delivering nutrients and averting micronutrient deficiencies..
- *Precision targeting:* By adding nutrients to the foods that these individuals usually eat, fortification allows for customized interventions that focus on specific populations that are at risk of nutrient deficiencies.
- *Convenient consumption:* Eating foods fortified with nutrients doesn't always need extra work or knowledge on the part of the consumer.
- *Improved accessibility:* Compared to direct supplementation, fortification enables more efficient distribution to larger and more diverse populations.

Absence of stigma: Fortification is discreet and typically does not necessitate any physical indication that the food has been fortified.

Various factors related to food fortification, such as the fortification level, bioavailability of fortificants, and the quantity of fortified food consumed, greatly influence health outcomes [5, 6].

ADVANTAGES OF FOOD FORTIFICATION

The primary goal of fortification is to provide micronutrients in quantities that closely resemble those found in a well-balanced diet. Consequently, staple foods that have been fortified will contain micronutrient levels that are similar to or close to natural levels, which may not be the case with supplements.

Fortifying widely distributed and commonly consumed foods has the potential to enhance the nutritional status of a significant portion of the population, regardless of socioeconomic status. Unlike dietary pattern changes, which can be challenging to implement, especially in the short term, fortification does not require individual compliance.

DISADVANTAGES OF FOOD FORTIFICATION

Fortified foods, although enriched with additional micronutrients, should not be viewed as a replacement for a well-rounded diet that provides sufficient energy, protein, essential fats, and other essential nutrients necessary for optimal health.

Fortified foods frequently do not reach the most economically disadvantaged segments of the population, who are at heightened risk of micronutrient deficiencies. This disparity arises from limited access to fortified foods due to low purchasing power and an underdeveloped distribution infrastructure.

Technological challenges associated with food fortification remain unresolved, particularly concerning determining the optimal levels of nutrients, ensuring the stability of fortificants, managing nutrient interactions, addressing physical properties, and satisfying consumer preferences, including cooking properties and taste.

FORTIFICATION STRATEGY TO REDUCE MICRONUTRIENT DEFICIENCY

Food fortification has significantly reduced the prevalence of micronutrient deficiencies (MNDs), which were once widespread, leading to improvements in the health status and various key indicators, including economic and educational status, among large segments of the population. In 2002, the World Health Report identified iodine, iron, vitamin A, and zinc deficiencies as some of the most serious health

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risk factors globally. To address MNDs, four key strategies have been identified: dietary improvement, supplementation, food fortification (FF), and global public health measures along with other disease control measures. Food fortification is recognized as one of these strategies with the best value performance. While short-term strategies like nutrient supplementation have provided immediate relief in several countries, they are not sustainable in the long term. The World Bank, World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, Micronutrient Initiative (MI), and Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) have all acknowledged fortification as one of the most cost-effective health interventions. Currently, adding micronutrients to basic meals is becoming more and more famous in lots of developing international locations. [7].

India—Mandatory Rice Fortification

In Andhra Pradesh, India, women and children are disproportionately affected by micronutrient deficiencies. The Prime Minister's Office responded by launching the National Nutrition Mission in early 2018 to address this issue, It is recognized that a cost-effective method of treating deficiencies in important vitamins and minerals is staple food fortification.

Among Andhra Pradesh's main foods, rice stands out as the most effective way to feed the most economically disadvantaged people since, when properly fortified, it can contain a variety of minerals and vitamins. Vulnerable populations receive nutrient-wealthy fortified rice thru the government's three foremost food resource programs, the Mid-Day Meal Scheme (MDM), the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), and the Public Distribution System (PDS).

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) developed the criteria for fortified rice following in-depth expert consultations that included solid clinical data from renowned Indian academic institutions. Continuous blending is an encouraging and cost-effective blending approach that Sight and Life, in collaboration with Tata Trust and the regional government, has implemented to improve these activities. This is the first time that a technique like this has been used in India to fortify rice as part of large-scale government initiatives [8].

Food Fortification in Developed Countries

Food fortification has proven to be a successful, long-lasting, and cost-effective way to increase the availability of micronutrients and address their inadequacies Compared to emerging and undeveloped countries, food fortification has demonstrated significantly higher success and effectiveness in industrialized nations.

The sustainability of food fortification programs can be attributed to several factors:

Large, centralized food industries: These industries have the capacity to implement and sustain fortification programs on a large scale, ensuring widespread availability of fortified foods.

Packaging and labeling: Clear packaging and labeling facilitate oversight and implementation of fortification initiatives, ensuring that consumers are informed about the fortified products they purchase.

Knowledgeable consumers: Consumers in developed countries generally have a better understanding of the importance of healthy nutrition and are willing and able to purchase fortified products to meet their nutritional needs [9].

Food Fortification in Developing Countries

More than 80 developed and developing countries have effectively implemented fortification programs to treat vitamin deficiencies. Fortifying staple foods including wheat, maize, and rice flour has been recognized as an effective approach in Sub-Saharan Africa.

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In Nigeria, the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration Control (NAFDAC) monitors compliance with food fortification standards during the distribution and retail phases, while the Standards Organization of Nigeria (SON) establishes the requirements. Nigeria began its first national fortification program in 1993 with iodized salt and then expanded it to require the addition of other vitamins and minerals to wheat and semolina flour, maize flour, sugar, and vegetable oil.

The biofortification of staple crops and the implementation of food fortification standards are given top priority in Nigeria's National Policy on Food and Nutrition.

In Nigeria, processed foods were found to have inadequate amounts of iron and vitamin A, even in the face of many regulatory regimes [10].

The government of Kenya has approved the mandatory fortification of staple foods such as vegetable oil, salt, and wheat flours. It has been implemented to fortify cereal flours with vitamin A, B-complex, iron, zinc, and iodine found in salt and vegetable oils.

The government ensures that staple foods are adequately fortified and that fortifying chemicals are safe and effective, working with the Ministry of Health's food safety unit and the Kenya Bureau of Standards.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this examine underscores the important role of meals fortification in enhancing public health. Through a thorough review, it is evident that fortifying meals with crucial nutrients addresses deficiencies, promotes properly-being, and prevents fitness conditions. By enriching generally consumed meals, fortification techniques enhance dietary status and make contributions to higher normal health consequences. Effective in focused on particular deficiencies like iodine and folic acid, fortification initiatives gain maternal and child fitness while also doubtlessly lowering the load of continual sicknesses. This assessment emphasizes the vast impact of food fortification on global fitness and well-being.

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