

The rerise of millets

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Millets have a big history in the world, especially in India. After the advent of high yielding varieties of rice and wheat during the 1970s, millets got side-lined from the food planning. In this current pandemic situation and considering health benefits, our people are aware of our traditional wonder crops and they have started to get back to the traditional food crops. Millets are coarse grains and are rich in protein, fibre, vitamins and minerals. They include cholam (sorghum), ragi (finger millet), thinai (foxtail millet), varagu (kodo millet), saamai (little millet), kambu (pearl millet), panivaragu (proso millet) and kuthiraivaali (barnyard millet). Nowadays high consumption of refined flour and polished rice have increased and due to this, there has been a decrease in the consumption of millets in our diet. This trend clubbed with a sedentary lifestyle leads to obesity, diabetes, hypertension and other diseases. Millets have nutraceutical and health-promoting properties. Millet is known for its fibre content. The high fibre level found in millet helps to reduce low-density lipoprotein (LDL) or bad cholesterol while simultaneously boosting high-density lipoprotein (HDL) or good cholesterol. In addition to this, fibre content also aids in resolving heart problems by reducing blood pressure, which reduces the risk of heart attack and stroke. Millets also act as a probiotic feeding for microbiota in our gut. The golden grain contains various antioxidants including selenium, quercetin, and pantothenic acid which protect the body against free radical damage and oxidative stress, thereby helping to prevent many chronic diseases. Being rich in iron as well as folic acid, millets tend to prevent anaemia by supporting the growth of red blood cells and maintaining haemoglobin levels. However, the irony is that, although wonder crop has so many benefits, it was once known as ‘the poor man’s crop’. This is because it grows in a wide range of climates and soil and comes in many varieties. It requires less sunlight and water than rice and grows in habitats where the cultivation of grain is difficult. But now, after knowing all its incredible gains it truly makes no sense in terming millet as such. Now, the consumption of millet is seeing a rise regardless of people’s social status. It is also fascinating to see that the traditional way of cooking millets is reviving after decades. And not to mention ready-to-cook millet products like millet flakes and vermicelli are seen in the market. The water retentive nature of crops is very beneficial to farmers and its easy growth, along with high nutrition value makes millet true ‘super crops’.

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