

# Plant-based foods reduce the burden of cancer, diabetes

## The Hindu, dt:02.11.25, pg.no. 12



**SPEAKING OF  
SCIENCE**

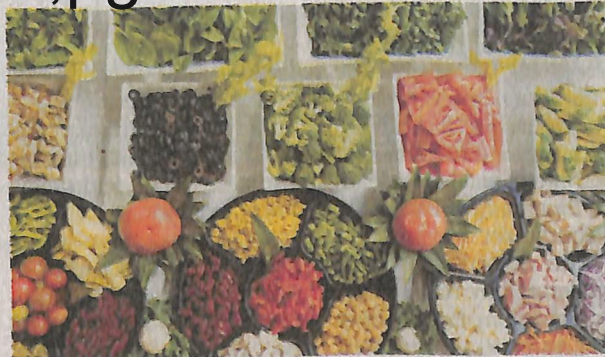
**D. Balasubramanian**

A report in July 2024 by V. Viallon and coauthors (*Scientific Reports* 14, 16330) discussed the use of a healthy lifestyle index (HLI) to investigate specific disease outcomes. The authors studied how individual lifestyles were associated with disease outcomes. They used data from the European Prospective Investigation into Cancer and Nutrition (EPIC) and the risk of diseases like type 2 diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular disorders, causing premature death. Some of these lifestyles also involved unhealthy practices like smoking, excess alcohol consumption, dietary ha-

bits, adiposity (excess fat in the body), and excessive sleep.

In the same vein, a paper by Reynaldo Cordova of Spain and coauthors from Denmark, South Korea, Northern Ireland-U.K., and Denmark, titled 'Plant-based dietary patterns and age-specific risk of multimorbidity of cancer and cardiometabolic diseases: a prospective analysis' appeared in the August 2025 issue of *The Lancet - Healthy Longevity*. The term 'multimorbidity' refers to the presence of two or more long-term (chronic) health conditions in a single person.

The researchers examined data of about 2.3 lakh individuals with such multimorbid cancer from the EPIC data bank and 1.81 lakh individuals from the UK Biobank. Based on analysing this data, they pointed out the crucial role and



About 35% Indians are vegetarians; they use foodgrains and many vegetables in their daily food. DAN GOLD/UNSPASH

mechanism of insulin resistance in metabolic disease. Upon comparing specific cohorts of people aged 35-70 and/or with characteristics such as certain dietary habits, the researchers concluded that a healthy plant-based diet might reduce the burden of multimorbidity of cancer and cardiometabolic diseases.

The study also reported evidence of how plant-based diets are also envi-

ronmentally more sustainable than diets with a higher proportion of animal products (including meat, fish, and eggs).

The researchers were able to associate a higher adherence to a healthy plant-based diet with a lower risk of cancer and cardiovascular diseases (including hypertension, stroke, heart attack, and type 2 diabetes).

The use of tobacco pro-

ducts also leads to cancer. The much-lauded Mediterranean diet is cited to be very good, although the use of fish, chicken, and red wine is allowed in the Mediterranean region. Note that vegetarian or vegan diets, which exclude any animal-based diets, also have lower greenhouse gas emissions. While vegetarians use milk and occasionally some eggs, vegans strictly avoid even milk, which is an animal product.

### **Situation in India**

Turning to India, about 35% of the people are vegetarians; they use foodgrains and many vegetables in their daily food, as well as milk; some of them use eggs as well. About 10% are vegans, who don't even use milk.

The presence of two or more long-term (chronic) health conditions in an in-

dividual is worrisome. It is estimated that 16.4% of the urban population is diabetic, while 8% of rural people are pre-diabetic. About 26% of urban Indian men and women are insulin-resistant with metabolic disorders. Unfortunately, about 29% of them smoke bidis, cigarettes, and hookah, and the tobacco in them causes cancer. The rural population doesn't only smoke: many of its members also chew betel nuts, an excess of which can lead to oral cancer. Those over 60 years of age account for 13% of people with diabetes and further suffer from age-related disorders such as dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

It is high time that our medical community, society, political leaders, and State and Central governments take note of this alarming situation and find ways to overcome it.