

## ASSESSMENT OF DIETARY PATTERNS OF ADOLESCENTS IN SCHOOLS OF ANURADHAPURA MUNICIPAL COUNCIL AREA

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Adolescents can be considered as a nutritionally vulnerable segment of the population. As their rapid growth rate demands higher and consistent nutrient supply, inappropriate eating habits have both immediate and long term adverse health consequences, affecting their growth and development in addition to less resistance for diseases. A cross-sectional study was carried out with 309 school students aged 12-16 yrs, randomly selected from ten schools in Anuradhapura Municipal Council area, to assess the dietary patterns and food preferences. Data were collected using a validated food frequency questionnaire and 24 hour dietary recall sheet during school hours. Results from the study revealed that, when compared with the food based dietary guidelines, most of the adolescents did not receive recommended daily servings of fruits (89.0%), vegetables (64.1%), milk and dairy products (89.3%) and water (73.8%) while consumption of junk foods (52.4%) was more than the recommended servings. Nearly half of the adolescents from the study group (51.1%) preferred small frequent meals than three large meals per day, while 67.3% of them had recorded themselves to be semi vegetarians. Vegetarian type significantly associated with race ( $p=0.000$ ) and sex ( $p=0.000$ ) while sex of the adolescents did not significantly related to size and frequency of meal they preferred ( $p=0.111$ ). However, frequency of having meals away from home significantly associated with sex ( $p=0.069$ ). Daily consumption of nuts and oil seeds significantly varied with sex ( $p=0.039$ ) though it was not significant with race ( $p=0.179$ ). Besides, there was no significant difference between nutritional status and frequency of having meals away from home ( $p=0.475$ ). Findings of the study suggest that it is essential to conduct nutrition education programs in schools to improve food choices and healthy eating habits among adolescents and thereby help proper maintenance of health preventing diseases in adulthood.

**Keywords:** 24 Hour dietary recall, Adolescents, Dietary patterns, Food frequency questionnaire