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The Heroes in our Midst



*Rohit Agarwal,
Communication Specialist, SBCC*

In the fifth month of Jaya Kharadi's pregnancy, her doctor advised her complete rest as she was in poor health. So, her husband Mukesh did all the domestic chores and took care of her and her meals. The couple, residents of Nala Fala village in Dungarpur district, are today proud parents of healthy twin girls.

Mukesh's actions might seem unremarkable, but in the patriarchal milieu he lives in, they are significant. In southern Rajasthan, domestic responsibilities and childcare fall solely on women, as is the case in much of the world. Often, women do not have the autonomy to make decisions for themselves or on matters concerning their health. Other family members, such as her husband or mother-in-law, wield that power in the household.

Mukesh and Jaya's story shows that a supportive family environment that prioritises nutrition and recommended pregnancy care and childcare practices is crucial for good maternal and child health. That is why RajPusht, in its quest to improve maternal and child health and nutrition, reaches out not just to mothers, but also to their families and the larger community.

Our Social & Behaviour Change Communication initiatives, such as interpersonal counselling and community mobilisation using the Participatory Learning & Action technique, have been operational in five districts of Rajasthan for more than a year now. We are seeing our efforts bear results.

Meet our 'Aslee Bahubalis'



*Ambalal Gameti
Solariya village, Udaipur*

The former sarpanch wields significant influence in his village, which he has put to good use by championing maternal and child nutrition. Take the case of Sushila, a mother in his village whose husband Rajulal worked as a daily-wage labourer in Rajkot, Gujarat. After Ambalal found out that Sushila's baby Lokesh was malnourished, he requested her in-laws to get him treated and focus on the mother and child's diet. When that didn't work, he talked to her husband over the phone and convinced him to return to the village. Raju sought medical help at a local health centre and in Udaipur city. Today, Lokesh is a healthy one-year-old child.



*Sugna Bai
Vaas Kheda village, Udaipur*

Sugna Bai's sister-in-law gave birth to a weak child, who eventually suffered from severe acute malnutrition. When RajPusht's Poshan Champion Durgesh Vaishnav counselled their family regarding the child's care and nutrition, most family members ignored her. So, Sugna Bai took it upon herself to assist her sister in getting medical care for the child. She took the baby to the hospital for treatment and also supported her sister-in-law with domestic chores so that she had more time and energy to look after her child.



*Kishan Bhanat
Badla village, Udaipur*

Kishan took care of his daughter-in-law as his son stayed outside the village for work. He has advocated for family planning and maintaining a gap between the first and the second child not only in his family but also in his community.

While change takes time to percolate through society, there are individuals who have given maternal and child nutrition the consideration it deserves. These include not just family members, but also neighbours and other people in the community. Their contributions range from providing nutritious foods to pregnant women to ensuring that a malnourished child receives proper medical care. These are significant efforts in societies where many view childrearing as a mother's job and believe that pregnant women do not require special care or food. In one case, the joint efforts of frontline workers and medical officers saved the life of an infant born with macrocephaly (excessively large head) through swift referrals and the provision of institutional support.

You can view these stories in our new campaign [Aslee Bahubali](#) (The Real Bahubali). It identifies and publicises real-life changemakers with significant contributions to maternal and child health in their families or communities. By showcasing their achievements, we seek to recognise their efforts publicly and inspire others in their communities to emulate the examples they have set.

Food without Nutrition



Divakar Jharbade, Block Programme Manager, Salumber, Udaipur

As a Block Programme Manager with RajPusht, I regularly interact with mothers and their families in urban as well as rural areas and ask them about their and their children's dietary habits. I have been observing that people feed children junk food once they are old enough for complementary feeding—and sometimes, even when they are younger than six months.

Our Poshan Champions recommend them to feed mashed rotis, fruits, dalia, well-mashed dal, etc. to complement breastfeeding once the child completes six months. But many parents give their children biscuits, chocolates, chips, sugary sodas and other packaged snacks. There are many reasons for this. "These are cheap, tasty and easily available," says Devi Kanhaiya Lal of Juni Bhai village. Small packets of chips cost as little as ₹5 while one can buy candies for ₹1. Besides, junk foods use excess sugar, salt and spices to become irresistible to consumers. "My child does not eat rotis. He only likes to eat fried snacks," says Savita Khemraj of Dalbi village.

Deepika Vijay of Patwari ki Pol also tries to give her baby home-made complementary foods. But her child does not like these, so she also gives her chips and biscuits. Hansa Bheemraj of Tharoda village says, "Whenever my child cries or throws tantrums, I give him packaged snacks to quieten him." Working parents, who might not have much time to look after the child, often give them junk food as it's easy to carry around and sometimes more convenient than cooking.



One-on-one counselling by an ANM using RajPusht's job aid on MCHN Day in Pratapgarh



RCHO and DPM-NHM interacting with the community during a Village Health, Sanitation & Nutrition Committee meeting in Banswara



VHSNC meeting at Dholam 5 Anganwadi Centre, Chhipa Barod, Baran



Jan Swasthya Sandesh Divas, a community-based event in Chhabra Block, Baran



PMMVY beneficiaries filling the registration form at the Panchayat Office, Bhatewar, Udaipur

However, what one gains in convenience, one loses in nutrition. Dr Rajesh Joshi, Child Specialist, Salumber Sub-divisional Hospital, says, “These foods fill children’s bellies and satisfy their hunger, but they do not provide any nutrition.” They contain ‘empty calories’, that is, they might have ample fats and carbohydrates, but little or no protein, fibre, vitamins or minerals. Nutrition deficiencies not only impede children’s growth, but also make them susceptible to diseases.

Over the past fortnight, I have interacted with over 11 parents and asked them whether junk food is harmful. Of them, two agreed, three said they weren’t harmful and six said they didn’t know. Many of RajPusht’s Poshan Champions and Block Programme Managers have also had similar observations. When Poshan Champions counsel households, they tell them about the harm caused by junk food and what they can feed the child instead. With ANMs and Anaganwadi Workers also counselling communities and ASHAs conducting community meetings under the Village Health, Sanitation & Nutrition Committee platform, we seek to inculcate healthy nutritional behaviours.

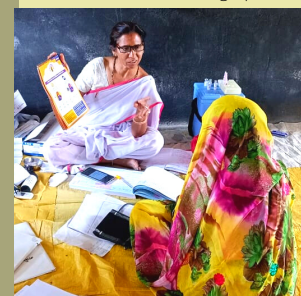
It takes effort to switch to complementary feeding after 6 months of breastfeeding the child. Therefore, the responsibility must not fall on the mother alone. If other family members also cooperate in feeding, it is much easier. If children do not take to one kind of food, parents must try others. The more diverse the diet, the healthier it is. For instance, if the child does not like rotis, then family members can try other dishes that might appeal to them more or use games to make feeding fun. Fruits like bananas and mangoes are as easy to carry as packaged snacks, so one can feed these if cooked food is not available. Local, seasonal foods are often cheaper than junk foods. Small alterations in meals made for adults can make it suitable or appealing to children. Such changes go a long way in ensuring children's health and nutrition.



Poshan Champion Punji Lal Damor giving information on IGMPY & PMMVY at an NREGA site in Mewara village, Dungarpur



PC Magan Lal Bhagora measuring a child's height using infantometer mats, Bichiwara, Dungarpur



An ANM counselling a pregnant woman using a job aid on MCHN Day, Bhatewar, Udaipur



Counselling by Block Programme Manager Asif Mohammad, Pipalkhunt, Pratapgarh



BPM Harish Katara explains the data syncing process to a staff nurse, Chhabra CHC, Baran



A Nutrition Powerhouse



Come summer and people start talking about onions. The humble vegetable is a staple of many Indian cuisines across seasons. But as the sun beats down upon us, many recommend carrying an onion bulb in a pocket for protection from the heat. While there is no scientific evidence for this claim, there are several benefits of eating the vegetable.

Raw onion is a good source of sulphuric compounds, flavonoids and phytochemicals. Quercetin is a particularly valuable flavonoid as it acts as an antioxidant. These compounds help neutralise 'free radicals' (highly reactive molecules that cause cell damage), thereby reducing inflammation in the body.

Quercetin might have anti-carcinogenic properties too. High concentrations of quercetin are associated with the inhibition of cancerous cells' growth. There is also an association between a diet rich in quercetin and a reduction in risk of mortality from coronary heart disease as well as a reduced risk of stroke. Various research studies on animals have found that quercetin reduces blood pressure, total cholesterol and insulin (high insulin levels are often associated with diabetes).

Red onions are a rich source of potassium and natural sugars, which help maintain electrolyte balance, like oral rehydration solutions do. This is especially important in summer because as the body sweats to keep cool, we lose vital salts.



Awesome!



Nutrients	Nutrition Value (mg/100gm)
Calcium	21.03 mg
Phosphorous	32.34 mg
Sodium	5.5 mg
Potassium	171 mg
Magnesium	17.96 mg
Folate	28.88 mcg
Vitamin C	6.69 mg
Natural Sugars	4.73 gm