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SEASONED TO TASTE



Nutrition: The factor why you must opt for the seasonal produce

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MUST we thank science for making everything available all the time? Well, it's the middle of June and you still get apples, cauliflowers and even carrots. That is if you ignore the fact that the apples are not as juicy, the spinach limp and the cauliflower infested with germs! Still most of us are ready to ignore all these vital signs and trust the fact that we are eating healthy and even ready to pay a premium for them.

That might be a complete misconception though. "By default out of season produce cannot be organic. It has to be cultivated in special circumstances or brought by air over long distance. In cultivation it is but accepted that pesticides will be essential so there is a higher chance of its use in out of season produce," says Dr Shivani Sachdev Gour, gynaecologist and fertility expert, Phoenix hospital. Gour shares a new research from Indiana University that shows babies conceived in the spring and early summer have a higher risk for a wide range of birth defects, including Down syndrome, cleft palate etc suggesting that pesticide exposure may influence birth outcomes. "We need to take this indication seriously as use of pesticides in India is huge and so is the occurrence of birth defects," she further adds.



Pesticides don't emerge as the only concern though. The 'farm fresh' tag on the shelf of your neighbourhood mart may be misleading in the true sense of the word because the stock in them may have been in the warehouse and transit for a long period before that. In case of cold storage stock, the nutritional content gets compromised to a large extent. "Seasonal stock is richer nutritionally because it grows in favourable climatic conditions. Moreover, storage for a length of time chemically alters its content. The water-soluble vitamins like B and C group) as well as the fat-soluble vitamins (K, A, E etc) get altered. A lot of other vitamins get diminished in processing," says nutritionist Honey Khanna, Max Healthcare, Delhi. The method of processing and storage also makes a difference. For instance, half a dried apricot provides 126 international units of vitamin A, compared with 337 international units for half a fresh apricot. So, you know what you must opt for next time.

Even celebrity nutritionist and fitness trainer Rujuta Diwekar in her book *Don't Lose Your Mind, Lose Your Weight* strongly asserts "as much as possible, eat local produce and seasonal food. Climate, altitude, humidity, wind, soil quality etc influence our digestive systems and foods that grow locally." Even Ayurveda recommends following a diet according to seasonal regime (*Ritucharya*) because the constitution or *dosha* of the body and the seasons are intimately related. "Mangoes are great in summer. Eat them just once a day as a mini meal in themselves, and they will give you a season's supply of antioxidants. Store them in your fundu fridge for rains and you won't enjoy them as much; they won't taste half as good and would have lost most of their nutrients," Diwekar further adds.

Next time remember to limit your palak-paneer cravings to winter months.