

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Assessment of Campus Food and Wellness Facilities under the 'Eat Right Campus' Initiative by FSSAI: A Cross-sectional Study

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ABSTRACT

Background: The *Eat Right Campus* initiative by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) aims to promote safe, nutritious, and sustainable food environments in institutional settings. Despite its potential, there is limited empirical evidence on its real-world implementation in Indian colleges.

Objective: To assess students' awareness of healthy dietary practices, evaluate the current state of campus food safety and hygiene, and examine the availability of nutritious food options.

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional survey was conducted among 500 college students using a structured questionnaire based on *Eat Right Campus* standards. Data on demographics, dietary habits, food safety awareness, and campus wellness facilities were analyzed using descriptive statistics in Microsoft Excel 2007.

Results: The majority of respondents were aged 18–21 years (95%) and male (57.8%). Less than 30% reported availability of fresh, local, or traditional foods. Healthy snacks were absent for 68.8% of students, and over 50% were unaware of fortified food usage. Facilities for physical activity or mental well-being were reported absent by more than half the respondents. High "Don't know" responses indicated low awareness of healthy eating and food safety practices.

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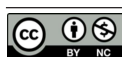
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Conclusion: The findings reveal significant gaps in nutrition awareness, food safety standards, and availability of healthy food options on campus. Strengthened awareness programs, stricter hygiene compliance, and diversified nutritious offerings are recommended to align with FSSAI standards.

KEYWORDS

• Eat Right Campus • FSSAI • Nutrition Awareness • Food Safety • Fortified Foods • Campus Wellness

INTRODUCTION

Nutrition plays a pivotal role in the prevention and management of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as obesity, type 2 diabetes mellitus, hypertension, and cardiovascular disorders. These diseases have emerged as leading causes of morbidity and mortality worldwide, with the World Health Organization (WHO) identifying unhealthy diets and sedentary lifestyles as major modifiable risk factors. The nutrition transition marked by increased consumption of energy-dense, nutrient-poor processed foods, sugary beverages, and excessive fats, coupled with declining physical activity has accelerated the global NCD crisis.

In India, the situation presents a complex “dual burden” of malnutrition. While undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies remain prevalent in certain populations, especially in rural and economically disadvantaged groups, there is a simultaneous rise in overweight, obesity, and diet-related NCDs, particularly among urban and young adult populations. Higher education campuses are particularly important settings for implementing preventive strategies, as college and university years represent a critical period for establishing lifelong dietary and lifestyle habits. Students are often exposed to new environments, greater autonomy in food choices, and peer influences that can either positively or negatively shape their health behaviors. Institutional policies, campus food services, and wellness facilities thus have a direct and long-lasting impact on students’ nutritional status and overall well-being.

In this context, the **Eat Right Campus** initiative, launched in 2018 under the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India’s (FSSAI) broader *Eat Right India* movement,

offers a comprehensive framework to promote healthier food environments in educational institutions, workplaces, and other community settings. Built upon four foundational pillars **food safety, nutrition, sustainability, and awareness** the initiative aims to ensure that food served and sold on campuses is safe, nutritious, and environmentally sustainable, while also fostering awareness and behavioral change among stakeholders.

Despite its promising objectives, the real-world adoption, compliance, and effectiveness of the Eat Right Campus guidelines in Indian higher education settings remain insufficiently explored in the literature. There is limited empirical evidence on the extent to which institutions have integrated these standards into their food procurement, preparation, and service systems, as well as in their wellness infrastructure.

The present study, titled “**Assessment of Campus Food and Wellness Facilities under the ‘Eat Right Campus’ Initiative by FSSAI: A Cross-sectional Study**”, seeks to address this gap by systematically evaluating the implementation status of the initiative in a university setting. The findings aim to provide actionable insights for policymakers, campus administrators, and public health practitioners to enhance the reach and impact of nutrition and wellness interventions in academic institutions.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

- To evaluate awareness of healthy dietary practices among college students.
- To assess compliance of campus food outlets with food safety and hygiene standards.
- To determine the availability and consumption of nutritious food options.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A descriptive cross-sectional survey was conducted to capture a snapshot of students' awareness, perceptions, and experiences regarding campus food and wellness facilities.

1. Study Population and Sampling

The study population comprised undergraduate and postgraduate students from a leading university in Madhya Pradesh. A total of 500 students participated in the survey, selected through convenience sampling. Data collection was conducted using both online Google Forms and in-person administration to ensure wider reach and participation across diverse academic disciplines and year levels.

2. Data Collection Tool

A structured questionnaire was developed in alignment with the *Eat Right Campus* guidelines, covering multiple thematic areas. It included sections on demographic information such as age, gender, and year of study; awareness and availability of local, seasonal, and traditional foods; access to healthy food options; practices aimed at limiting salt, sugar, and fat; awareness of fortified foods; and the availability of wellness and lifestyle facilities within the campus environment.

3. Data Analysis

Data collected from the structured questionnaire were compiled and coded in Microsoft Excel and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were calculated to summarize demographic characteristics and responses across the domains of the *Eat Right Campus* framework (availability of healthy food, food safety practices, awareness of fortified foods, and wellness facilities). The Chi-square test was employed to examine associations between categorical variables such as gender, age group, and awareness levels. Where applicable, cross-tabulations were performed to explore patterns of responses within subgroups. A p-value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant. Graphs and tables were generated to visually represent the data distribution, highlighting key trends and gaps in compliance with the FSSAI *Eat Right Campus* guidelines.

4. Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Responses were recorded anonymously to ensure confidentiality and encourage honest participation. Necessary institutional permission was granted before the initiation of the study to comply with ethical and administrative requirements.

RESULTS

1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

A total of 500 students participated. The majority were aged between 18–21 years, with a fairly even split between the 18–19 and 20–21 year groups. More than half were male, and most respondents were in their second year of study.

Table1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 500)

Parameter	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	18–19	238	47.6
	20–21	237	47.4
	22–23	25	5.0
Gender	Male	289	57.8
	Female	211	42.2
Year of Study	First Year	53	10.6
	Second Year	440	88.0
	Third Year	7	1.4

2. Availability of Local, Seasonal, and Traditional Foods

Students were asked about the presence of locally sourced, seasonal produce and traditional dishes in campus food services. Less than one-third reported availability of fresh fruits and vegetables, while nearly half stated these were not provided. Awareness of local whole grains was low, with 49.6% indicating their absence and 32.2% unsure. Interestingly, traditional dishes had a higher reported presence at 43.6%.

Table 2: Availability of Local, Seasonal, and Traditional Foods

Food Type	Yes (%)	No (%)	Don't Know (%)
Fresh fruits, vegetables, salads	26.8	49.2	24.0
Local whole grains	18.2	49.6	32.2
Local/traditional dishes	43.6	36.2	20.2

3. Healthy Food Options

The provision of healthy snacks, beverages, and cooking practices was evaluated. A significant 68.8% reported that healthy snacks were unavailable. Conversely, healthy drinks (e.g., fresh juices, low-sugar beverages) were more commonly available, with 51.4% reporting their presence. Healthy cooking practices, such as steaming and baking instead of deep frying, were observed by only 26.3% of respondents. Menu rotation and avoidance of reused oil were largely unknown to students, with “Don’t know” responses reaching 50.2%.

Table 3: Availability of Healthy Food Options

Criteria	Yes (%)	No (%)	Don't Know (%)
Healthy snacks available	12.0	68.8	19.2
Healthy drinks available	51.4	33.2	15.4
Healthy cooking practices used	26.3	50.2	23.4
Menu rotation & no reused oil	23.6	26.2	50.2

4. Limiting Salt, Sugar, and Fat

When asked about efforts to limit the use of unhealthy ingredients, more than 45% of students were unsure whether such measures were implemented. Only 19% believed that high-fat, high-sugar, and high-salt foods were restricted, while over one-third reported no such restrictions. A similar pattern was seen for avoiding trans fats like vanaspati or margarine.

Table 4: Limitation of High Salt, Sugar, and Fat Foods

Criteria	Yes (%)	No (%)	Don't Know (%)
Avoid vanaspati, margarine, bakery shortening	18.6	26.6	54.8
Limit high-fat, sugary, and salty foods	19.0	36.0	45.0
Restrict sugary/aerated beverages	15.4	42.2	42.4
Avoid excess salt/sugar/pickle in cooking	36.2	31.6	32.3
Limit salt intake	22.0	33.0	44.0

5. Awareness of Fortified Foods

Fortified foods (rice, wheat flour, edible oil, milk) are integral to the *Eat Right Campus* standards, yet awareness among students was strikingly low. Across all fortified items, “Don’t know” responses dominated at 55–60%, indicating minimal communication or labeling in campus food services.

6. Wellness and Lifestyle Facilities

Students were also asked about wellness-related infrastructure and activities. Only 20.4% reported facilities for breastfeeding mothers and creche rooms. Physical activity areas such as gyms, yoga spaces, or parks were absent for 55% of respondents, while half noted a lack of meditation, nature walks, or counselling activities.

Table 5: Availability of Wellness Facilities

Facility/Activity	Yes (%)	No (%)	Don't Know (%)
Creche & breastfeeding room	20.4	40.2	39.4
Physical activity areas (gym, yoga, park)	17.4	55.0	27.6
Mental wellness activities (meditation, counselling)	26.0	50.0	24.0

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide important insights into the current state of campus food environments and wellness facilities in the context of the *Eat Right Campus* framework. Several critical gaps were identified in nutrition awareness, food safety compliance, and healthy food availability. These gaps are consistent with broader trends observed in similar institutional settings in India and globally.

1. Availability of Nutritious Food

The study revealed that less than one-third of students had access to fresh fruits and vegetables on campus, while only 18.2% reported the use of local whole grains. This limited availability of wholesome food choices reflects findings from Nelson *et al.* (2008), who reported that college students often face food environments dominated by processed and calorie-dense items. In India, Gupta *et al.* (2022) similarly found that university canteens tend to prioritize cost-efficiency and convenience over nutritional value, leading to a menu skewed toward fried snacks and sugary beverages.

The relatively higher availability of traditional dishes (43.6%) might indicate cultural retention in campus food services; however, without standardized nutrition guidelines, these traditional meals may not always meet health standards. The literature suggests that traditional recipes, when

adapted with healthier cooking methods and reduced salt/oil, can play a significant role in improving student nutrition (WHO, 2020).

2. Healthy Food Practices

Healthy snacks were available to only 12% of students, while healthy drinks had better coverage (51.4%). This discrepancy mirrors the trend noted by Fatimah *et al.* (2011), where beverages were often targeted for health-focused reforms, but food offerings lagged behind. The low prevalence of healthy cooking methods (26.3%) aligns with findings from Larson *et al.* (2012), who emphasized that food handlers' training and institutional policies strongly influence the quality of meals served in educational settings.

The high rate of "Don't know" responses regarding menu rotation and avoidance of reused oil (50.2%) indicates poor communication and transparency between food service providers and consumers. This suggests that even where healthier practices exist, they are not being effectively publicized to the student population.

3. Limiting Salt, Sugar, and Fat

Responses on limiting unhealthy ingredients showed substantial uncertainty, with over 45% of students unaware if such measures were in place. Studies have shown that reducing salt, sugar, and unhealthy fats in institutional meals can significantly impact long-term health outcomes (WHO, 2012). In Australia, the *Healthy Canteen Guidelines* require systematic reduction of these ingredients, supported by staff training and menu audits, which has led to measurable improvements in dietary quality (NSW Government, 2018). The absence of similar enforcement mechanisms in Indian campuses likely contributes to the persistence of high-fat and high-sugar offerings.

4. Awareness of Fortified Foods

Awareness of fortified food usage was strikingly low, with 55–60% of students responding "Don't know." Fortification is a key component of FSSAI's strategy to address micronutrient deficiencies, and its integration in institutional settings is crucial for achieving public health goals. Research from UNICEF (2021) indicates that awareness campaigns, labeling, and educational outreach significantly increase the uptake of fortified foods in schools and workplaces. The lack of awareness in this

study suggests that, even if fortified foods are being provided, there is a communication gap preventing students from recognizing and valuing them.

5. Wellness and Lifestyle Facilities

Physical activity facilities were absent for 55% of respondents, and mental wellness programs were unavailable to half the participants. These findings parallel Hagedorn *et al.* (2018), who found that campus wellness initiatives in the United States had higher success rates when integrated with nutrition programs, creating a holistic approach to health. The lack of infrastructure for wellness activities on the surveyed campus limits opportunities for students to engage in regular exercise, stress management, and social support systems all of which are known to complement healthy eating in preventing NCDs.

6. Implications for the Eat Right Campus Initiative

Overall, the findings indicate that the studied campus falls short of meeting the *Eat Right Campus* standards across all four pillars—Food Safety, Nutrition, Sustainability, and Awareness. The initiative's success depends not only on adopting guidelines but also on creating institutional policies, monitoring systems, and student engagement strategies. International examples, such as the *Healthy Campus Initiative* at the University of California, demonstrate that sustained leadership commitment, cross-departmental collaboration, and participatory student programs are critical for transforming campus health environments (UC Global Food Initiative, 2019).

CONCLUSION

This study revealed substantial gaps between the *Eat Right Campus* framework and the actual food and wellness environment of a central Indian university. Awareness of healthy dietary practices was found to be moderate to low, with many students uncertain about the availability of fresh, seasonal, and fortified foods, while food safety and hygiene standards often failed to meet FSSAI norms due to poor transparency and communication. Nutritious food options were limited, with menus skewed toward calorie dense, nutrient-poor items, and wellness infrastructure such as physical activity spaces and mental

health programs was largely absent. These deficiencies, occurring at a critical life stage for habit formation, risk perpetuating the burden of non-communicable diseases among young adults. The findings emphasize that certification guidelines alone are insufficient without effective implementation, monitoring, vendor training, and active student engagement. A holistic, culturally relevant approach that integrates nutrition, food safety, sustainability, and wellness supported by transparent communication and inclusive infrastructure is essential to transform campuses into true models of health and well-being.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study findings, it is recommended that universities adopt a comprehensive strategy to align their food and wellness environments with the *Eat Right Campus* framework. First, institutional policies should mandate the inclusion of fresh, seasonal, and fortified foods in daily menus, supported by regular vendor training on safe and healthy cooking methods. Second, awareness campaigns through workshops, menu labeling, and nutrition clubs should be implemented to improve students' knowledge of healthy diets, fortified foods, and food safety practices. Third, dedicated spaces for physical activity, mental health support, and breastfeeding should be established to foster a holistic wellness culture. Regular monitoring and audits by trained committees, in collaboration with FSSAI, will ensure sustained compliance and accountability. Finally, integrating student feedback mechanisms into food service planning will promote inclusivity and increase the acceptability of healthier options, ultimately creating a supportive environment for lifelong healthy habits.

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