

Generation Gap...

For my brother and I, with just one year difference in age, life was very different when we were kids. We ate what was placed on the plate before us. Plate was served with the amount of food mother felt that we could eat or what was available divided among all mouths to be fed. Generally there was fair distribution of food among all of us and strictly no food was to be wasted, not that there was any issue about it, as we were hungry by the time dinner was served. Food was all fresh and home cooked. It was prepared very carefully according to the requirements and there were no left-overs after the meal. We did not have a refrigerator and perishable food items were stored in a *doli* (hanging cupboard) with wire netting to save any food from insects and the like. Kind of things that were stored in the *doli* were food that required to be in cooler place, such as boiled milk (there was no pasteurised bottled milk), some vegetables and if there was any leftover food. Present generation may not believe us when we say that family food costs were almost half of the monthly income during our childhood in India.

Mother had great interest in keeping chickens and a small kitchen garden and fresh eggs and vegies came handy. Occasionally, only cheap seasonal fruits were on the table. Meat was a luxury and the whole family considered a feast if a pound of meat was cooked on Sundays. Lentils and vegetables with *chapatties* (Indian bread) or boiled rice provided for all our needs. When we were small, once or twice a month, we went with our mother to help her with grocery shopping. We learnt how to look for quality, freshness and price of items before deciding to buy, and as we grew a bit older, we were sent to market for shopping. When we were teenagers, we had a duty to cook evening meal for the family, whilst my father and mother were out perish visiting. After dinner it was our duty to wash the plates and dry them and put away. Sink was always left clean and tidy without any dirty dishes. To this day I have this habit of cooking and keeping tidy my surroundings.

Both my parents were aware of the nutritional value of growing children and somehow a balanced food was given to the four of us. The result is that all of us grew well, are taller than our parents (generation of the 1920's and 1930's) and compared to our same age friends. Since my father was being transferred every now and then because of his job, we were sent to boarding schools at the age of nine and ten. Father realising that the food at the hostel was deficient in animal proteins, arranged as a special case, an egg to be served to the two of us at breakfast. Obviously, it was unfair to all our friends on the table and we got enough flak for this, but it paid off and we were growing well.

Playing with commercial toys were just not the thing we did at school as no one had them. However, we had plenty to play with during the weekends or holidays. *Gulli Danda* (an Indian Game with a long and a short spindly stick), seven (or more) tiles, and Cricket (no fancy bats but self-carved pieces of wood and a small wooden ball) were the games of choice. The games involved teams and provided plenty of exercise and we did have large grounds where we could play. It was a healthy outdoor growing up and I do not recall getting bored or missing anything.

At boarding house in the school we learn to manage minor cuts and abrasions without the help of Band-Aids. The school had a clinic where a doctor was available every morning and evening, but it was only visited when one had any serious illness. We were periodically measured for height and weights and received regular tetanus, typhoid and cholera shots. By and large we were trained to take care of our health and not to run to the clinic for minor coughs and colds. Often boys got measles or mumps in the hostel and we were isolated until recovery.

Walking was a norm. Rich or poor, everybody walked to schools, hospitals, to bazaars for shopping and to visit family and friends. Many students and some teachers walked at least 5 Km, to and fro, to

school everyday. Unlike today, it was perfectly safe to go for long walks in the mountains and my father encouraged us to do that during our holidays. It was an experience my brother and I still talk about and left us both in the habit of exploring the beauty of nature to this day. At the time of our growing up, this sort a life was still considered to be privileged among our classmates and neighbors.

To that perspective, the world is unrecognisable today. I made my first phone call when I came to medical college in 1965. My niece, on seeing her father looking into his collection of old LPs, asked if the computer discs were so large at his younger days. She had never seen a record player, and her children will never know if computer discs existed!

Youngsters seems to have far easier life because of the opportunities they have. Today they spend far too much time on phones, TVs and similar gadgets. Interest in outdoor sports is limited. Obesity is on the rise and exercising is an effort. Whilst control of communicable diseases has been halted by immunisations and safe water, improved sanitation and with modern treatments, non-communicable diseases are on the rise. Hypertension, diabetes and chronic disease are linked to the kinds of food we consume and the sedentary life we lead. Parents are too busy to spend time with children at dinner table or spend quality time outdoors with children. It is difficult to satisfy children today with the toys that could be bought for them. Fast and processed food is the answer to spend as little time as possible in the kitchen. How to earn more money take priority on all family matters.

A friend of mine wrote to me in response to my last weeks article “Early Childhood Stress”, which sums up the cause of modern life in the way we treat our children and I quote him here: “I have often said that there are really no bad children, just bad parents. Not quite 100% true but very close. In the OECD countries, I think it has been my own generation that is largely to blame. Whilst we did suffer the results of the aftermath of World War II, we, also, had the benefit of the subsequent massive rise in living standards and wealth. We had parents who tried to make life better for us than it had been for them. We, in our turn, tried too hard to make life easier and more enjoyable and less demanding on our children and went too far. They, in turn have continued that excessive attitude instead of striking a balance between responsibility, stewardship and comfort”.

We learnt a lot from our parents but perhaps we did not recognise the hidden advantages of austere life at that time. The way of life, knowingly or unknowingly, our parents exposed us to, has benefited us to a great deal and enabled us to survive this tough world. Perhaps our parents uttered the same words whilst bringing us up by saying that present generation is far too soft, we say the same for our children and may be our children will repeat the same to their children!

Links to this article: [Under Old Items > Early Childhood Stress August 4, 2019](#); [So what is there left for us to eat! June 16, 2019](#)

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Phones at the dinner table: UMSI study explores attitudes



Checking email for work. Posting a photo to Facebook. Texting the kids to come downstairs. Sending a quick snap to a friend. People of all ages might use their smartphones in these ways during shared meals.

A new study from the University of Michigan explores how people use mobile phones during meals and how they feel about other people doing so. The researchers surveyed 1,163 people between the ages of 8 and 88 in English-speaking countries around the world.

The survey reveals that people's attitudes about whether or not you should be using a mobile phone at mealtimes depends heavily on what you are doing, and who else