

Abstract

Australian Native Plant Foods and Their Contribution to Diet Diversity [†]

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Abstract: The triple burden of malnutrition is identified with overnutrition, undernutrition and hidden hunger. Although global food production in terms of calories has kept pace with population growth, low-quality diets that lead to micronutrient deficiencies and chronic diseases have become a global problem. Over 2 billion people globally suffer from micronutrient deficiencies as a result of insufficient intake of vitamins and trace elements in the diet. Currently, about 60% of dietary calories come from staple foods such as rice, maize, wheat, potato and soybean. There is a clear relationship between the reliance on a few staple crops or low dietary diversity and malnutrition. Dietary diversity is increased when consumption of cereals is accompanied by a high intake of fruits, vegetables and pulses. The occurrence of antioxidants and important dietary phytochemicals in these underutilised fruits and vegetables further enhances their value as dietary interventions to promote health and wellbeing. Australian native plant foods are rich sources of micro nutrients. Some better known examples are, the Kakadu plum (*Terminalia ferdinandiana*) which is a good source of vitamin C, green plum (*Buchanania obovata*) which is rich in folates and the wattle seeds (*Acacia* spp.) which are high in protein, dietary fibre and trace elements. Therefore, there is a need to develop strategies to include these food crops in nutrition intervention programmes and promote them as healthy food choices to be incorporated into the diets of Australians. The introduction of Australian native plant foods among nutritionally vulnerable communities where undernutrition, hidden hunger and chronic diseases have been reported will help alleviate these health problems.

Keywords: native plant foods; underutilized fruits and vegetables; nutritional value; food security; malnutrition; diet; antioxidants

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