

**THE IMPACT OF BELIEF ON EATING HABIT OF THE ELDERLY:
INVESTIGATING HOW BELIEF INFLUENCES WHAT THEY CONSUME AND
BODY RESPONSES TO NUTRIENT**

By

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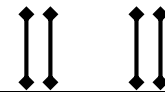
ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of belief on the eating habits of the elderly, with a particular focus on how different forms of belief influence the foods they consume and the body's response to nutrients. The study was undertaken because ageing is associated with several physiological changes that increase the nutritional needs of older adults while reducing their ability to absorb and utilize nutrients efficiently. Despite these nutritional challenges, the dietary practices of the elderly are often influenced by deeply rooted religious, cultural, traditional, and personal beliefs that determine food preferences, food taboos, meal patterns, and acceptance or rejection of certain foods. These beliefs may either encourage healthy dietary behaviours or contribute to poor nutritional practices, thereby affecting the health and well-being of older adults. The study reviewed the concepts of belief, explaining that belief serves as a guiding principle that shapes human attitudes, decisions, and behaviours, including food consumption. It further examined the influence of belief on eating habits, revealing that beliefs significantly determine the selection, preparation, frequency, and quantity of foods consumed by the elderly. The study also discussed the impact of nutrients on the health status of older adults, emphasizing that adequate intake of proteins, vitamins, minerals, healthy fats, fibre, and water is essential for maintaining muscle strength, improving immune function, preserving bone density, supporting cognitive function, preventing malnutrition, reducing the risk of chronic diseases, and promoting healthy ageing. Furthermore, the study highlighted that inappropriate dietary beliefs and unhealthy eating habits may result in nutrient deficiencies, weakened immunity, poor physical functioning, increased susceptibility to illness, and reduced quality of life. The study concluded that belief plays a vital role in shaping the eating habits of the elderly by influencing their food choices, dietary practices, and attitudes toward nutrition. One of the recommendations made was that Healthcare professionals and nutritionists should educate older adults on the importance of balanced nutrition while addressing cultural, religious, and personal beliefs that may influence their food choices.

KEYWORDS: Belief, Eating Habit, Elderly, Belief Influences, Body Responses, Nutrient

INTRODUCTION

The food choices of older adults are influenced by several factors, including age-related physiological changes, economic conditions, cultural practices, religious values, and personal beliefs. Among these factors, belief plays a significant role in determining what the elderly consider appropriate, acceptable, or beneficial to consume. Beliefs may originate from religious teachings, cultural traditions, personal experiences, or family influences, and they often shape dietary practices that affect nutritional intake and overall well-being. According to Connors and Halligan (2021), belief systems are mental representations that influence how individuals interpret the world, make judgments, and respond to experiences. Likewise, Eagly and Chaiken (2022)



explained that beliefs shape attitudes, which subsequently influence people's decisions and behaviours, including food choices.

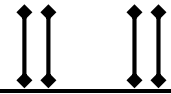
Eating habits among the elderly have important implications for their nutritional status and health outcomes. As individuals grow older, they become more vulnerable to nutritional deficiencies due to reduced appetite, declining metabolism, chronic illnesses, and changes in digestive function. Healthy eating habits promote physical strength, immune function, and disease prevention, whereas poor dietary practices increase the risk of malnutrition and chronic diseases. Sobal and Bisogni (2009) noted that eating habits are major determinants of nutritional status and overall health, while Gombart, Pierre, and Maggini (2020) emphasized that nutrients are essential for maintaining health, supporting immunity, and ensuring normal body functions. Therefore, the beliefs that guide food selection among the elderly may directly influence the quality and adequacy of nutrients consumed.

Furthermore, the interaction between belief, eating habits, and nutrient response becomes increasingly important in old age because the body responds differently to nutrient intake as physiological functions decline. Research has shown that belief systems can encourage or discourage the consumption of certain foods, thereby affecting nutrient intake and health outcomes. Major-Smith et al. (2023) reported that strong religious and spiritual beliefs are associated with structured dietary practices that influence nutrient intake, while Trabelsi et al. (2022) observed that faith-based dietary restrictions can significantly alter metabolic responses. In addition, Bauer (2021) and Beaudart (2023) highlighted that adequate nutrient intake is essential for maintaining muscle strength and healthy ageing. Therefore, investigating the impact of belief on the eating habits of the elderly is necessary to understand how these beliefs influence food consumption patterns and the body's response to nutrients, thereby contributing to improved nutritional interventions and healthier ageing.

Concept of Belief

A belief is the mental acceptance or conviction that a claim, concept, or thing is true, real, or valid. It serves as a personal stance or idea about the world that someone holds to be true, regardless of whether it is backed by absolute, objective evidence. Belief is a psychological and cognitive condition in which a person accepts something as real, genuine, or legitimate, frequently without the need for quick scientific evidence. It affects perception, judgment, and action and is a fundamental part of human thought processes. According to Connors & Halligan (2021), belief systems are mental representations that shape how individuals interpret the world, form judgments, and respond to experiences. Beliefs may be based on evidence, personal experience, cultural teachings, or faith, and they often function as guiding principles in everyday life.

Belief is a fundamental concept in understanding human cognition and society because it shapes knowledge formation and behavioral patterns. As noted by Eagly & Chaiken (2022), beliefs influence attitudes, which in turn guide intentions and actions in various social and personal contexts. Consequently, belief can be characterized as a mental acceptance or conviction that something is real or valid; it is influenced by social, cultural, emotional, and cognitive elements and is essential to human thought and conduct.



In addition, Belief is deeply connected to human perception of reality. As noted by De Houwer (2021), beliefs function as mental constructs that help individuals organize and interpret complex information in their environment. Beliefs help people make decisions easier, especially when they don't have access to all the information they need. Because of this, belief is a crucial instrument for dealing with uncertainty in day-to-day living.

Finally, belief systems are strongly influenced by culture, environment, and learning experiences. Hofstede (2020), said that cultural values shape how individuals develop beliefs about authority, morality, religion, and social behavior. For example, what is considered acceptable or unacceptable in one society may be interpreted differently in another due to culturally shaped belief systems. This highlights the social nature of belief formation.

Concept of Eating Habit

Eating habits refer to the consistent patterns in which individuals select, prepare, and consume food over time. These habits include meal timing, food preferences, portion sizes, and frequency of eating. They are shaped by biological needs as well as cultural, social, and environmental influences. Eating habits are widely recognized as a major determinant of nutritional status and overall health outcomes (Sobal & Bisogni, 2009), as noted by

Eating habits develop through a combination of personal experiences and external influences such as family upbringing, peer groups, socioeconomic status, and food availability. Psychological factors such as stress, mood, and emotional state also strongly influence dietary choices. In modern environments, advertising and increased availability of processed foods further modify eating behavior patterns (Konttinen, 2020), as noted by

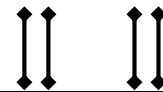
Healthy eating habits involve regular consumption of a balanced diet that includes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and adequate hydration. Such dietary patterns support growth, immune function, and prevention of chronic diseases like obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disorders. Long-term adherence to healthy eating patterns is strongly associated with improved life expectancy and reduced disease risk (Mozaffarian, 2016), as noted by

Poor eating habits include irregular meals, excessive intake of sugar, salt, and saturated fats, as well as frequent consumption of ultra-processed foods. These behaviors are strongly associated with obesity, hypertension, metabolic syndrome, and other non-communicable diseases. Research shows that high consumption of ultra-processed foods significantly increases the risk of cardiovascular and metabolic disorders (Montero, 2019), as noted by

Improving eating habits requires nutrition education, behavioral change strategies, and supportive food environments. Public health interventions such as dietary guidelines, school-based nutrition programs, and community awareness campaigns are effective in promoting healthier choices. Sustainable dietary change is most successful when supported by both individual motivation and structural food system improvements (Afshin, 2019), as noted by

Concept of Nutrients

Nutrients are chemical substances found in food that your body needs to survive, grow, repair itself, and function properly. They are classified into two main categories: macronutrients (needed in large amounts) and micronutrients (needed in smaller amounts). The term "nutrient"



refers to substances that are necessary for living things to be nourished, develop, maintain, and function properly. The body uses nutrients, which come from food, to support physiological processes, heal damaged tissues, and maintain life. As noted by Gombart, Pierre & Maggini (2020), nutrients are fundamental components required by the body to maintain health, support immunity, and facilitate normal metabolic processes.

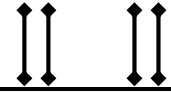
The relationship between nutrition and physical performance is further highlighted by the idea of nutrients. Nutrients help people execute daily tasks effectively by promoting muscular function, tissue repair, and physical endurance. According to Phillips, Chevalier, & Leidy (2022), nutrients provide the resources necessary for maintaining physical strength, functional capacity, and overall body performance. Malnutrition has severe consequences on human health, affecting physical and cognitive development, immune function, and overall well-being. (Alaba & OJo, 2025)

Additionally, mental health and cognitive development depend on nutrients. For memory, focus, learning, and decision-making to be supported, the brain needs a steady flow of nutrients. Gómez-Pinilla (2021) stated that adequate nutrient availability is crucial for optimal brain development and neurological health processes.

Impact of Belief on Eating Habit

Human eating habits are fundamentally governed by cognitive frameworks, demonstrating that what we choose to consume is often as much a product of our belief systems as it is of biological hunger. Sociocultural and religious beliefs act as powerful institutional guides, drawing distinct lines between permitted and forbidden foods while directly modulating consumption frequencies. A research by Major-Smith et al. (2023) indicates that highly active religious and spiritual beliefs strongly correlate with defined, structured dietary choices, often pushing individuals toward high-quality, health-conscious dietary patterns and structured micro-nutrient intake. Conversely, these institutional belief assets regularly shape macro-level eating behaviors through ritualistic caloric restriction and fasting. Across global belief structures—ranging from Islamic Ramadan and Christian Lent to Hindu Ekadasi—faith-driven food abstinence alters individual metabolic profiles and redefines societal relationships with food production, functioning as a "religious health asset" that implicitly mitigates global health threats like obesity (Trabelsi et al., 2022).

Beyond structured spiritual mandates, localized ideological and personal value-based beliefs significantly dictate modern nutritional habits. The modern transition toward sustainable, plant-based, and pro-environmental eating patterns is heavily mediated by an individual's personal values, felt obligations, and core identity. Behavioral modeling demonstrates that while rational intentions to eat healthily are common, the translation of these intentions into actual sustained eating habits relies heavily on "attitudes plus" (ingrained personal values) and positive emotional affect towards specific ethical or ecological systems (Lo Dato et al., 2025). When individuals firmly believe that their dietary choices carry direct environmental consequences, their purchasing and consumption habits structurally adapt away from energy-dense or animal-derived products. Therefore, cognitive alignment between personal identity and food philosophy operates as the primary cognitive driver behind contemporary dietary modifications, outperforming simple health awareness.



Crucially, maladaptive or distorted psychological beliefs can severely disrupt homeostatic eating habits, culminating in compromised metabolic outcomes. When an individual harbors irrational food beliefs—such as dichotomous "good versus bad" food tracking or relying on flawed compensatory assumptions like "exercising means dietary quality no longer matters"—the psychological friction alters functional eating phenotypes (Maradiag et al., 2025). These cognitive distortions actively foster problematic behaviors like emotional grazing, disorganized eating, and compulsive or hyperphagic episodes. Over time, these belief-driven maladaptive habits erode dietary self-control, trapping individuals in a cycle of addictive-like eating patterns where ultra-processed, highly palatable foods are used as regulatory coping mechanisms rather than nutritional fuel. Ultimately, the entire continuum of human eating behavior proves that our deeply held beliefs—whether theological, ecological, or deeply personal—dictate the physiological realities of nutritional health.

Impact of the Nutrient Eaten by Elderly on their Health Status

Because aging is frequently linked to decreased metabolism, weaker immunity, loss of muscle mass, poor appetite, and an increased risk of chronic diseases, nutrition is crucial to the health of the aged. The nutrients that older persons eat have a big impact on their general quality of life, mental and physical health, and resistance to disease. Proteins, vitamins, minerals, healthy fats, fiber, and water are examples of necessary nutrients that should be consumed in sufficient amounts to preserve health, avoid malnutrition, and lessen age-related problems.

➤ Maintenance of muscle mass, strength, and physical functioning

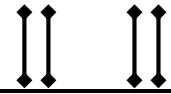
Maintaining muscular mass, strength, and physical functioning is one of the key effects of nutrients on the aged. Because sarcopenia, the progressive loss of skeletal muscle mass and strength, is frequently associated with aging, protein is particularly crucial. Elderly people who eat enough protein are better able to retain their mobility, protect their muscular tissue, and lower their risk of frailty and falls. According to Bauer (2021) and Beaudart (2023), higher protein intake in older adults is associated with improved muscle health, physical performance, and healthier aging outcomes.

➤ Immune system and resistance to disease

The immune system and resistance to illness are also impacted by nutrients. Minerals like iron, zinc, and selenium, as well as vitamins like A, C, D, and E, assist the body in fighting inflammation and infections. Inadequate consumption of these minerals may make older adults more susceptible to disease, slow the healing of wounds, and exacerbate long-term medical issues. Calder (2020) explains that nutrition strongly influences immune defense, especially in older adults, whose immunity naturally declines with age.

➤ Bone health, cognitive function, and chronic disease prevention

The prevention of chronic diseases, cognitive function, and bone health are all significantly impacted. In addition to lowering the risk of osteoporosis and fractures, calcium and vitamin D help preserve bone density. Foods high in antioxidants, B vitamins, and omega-3 fatty acids may



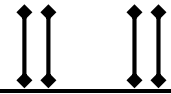
promote brain health and slow cognitive decline. Additionally beneficial to heart health, blood sugar regulation, and digestive function are fiber, fruits, vegetables, and healthy fats. Studies show that healthy dietary patterns such as the Mediterranean diet are linked with better cardiovascular health, lower inflammation, and improved cognitive outcomes in older adults (Shlisky, 2022; Granic, 2021).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, belief plays a vital role in shaping the eating habits of the elderly by influencing their food choices, dietary practices, and attitudes toward nutrition. These beliefs, whether religious, cultural, or personal, can have positive or negative effects on the nutrients they consume and the way their bodies respond to those nutrients. Since proper nutrition is essential for maintaining good health, preventing diseases, and improving the quality of life in old age, it is important to understand the influence of belief on dietary behaviour. Such understanding will help promote healthier eating habits and support effective nutritional interventions that respect the beliefs and values of older adults.

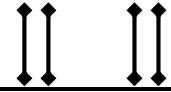
RECOMMENDATION

1. Healthcare professionals and nutritionists should educate older adults on the importance of balanced nutrition while addressing cultural, religious, and personal beliefs that may influence their food choices.
2. Elderly individuals should undergo regular health and nutritional assessments to identify nutrient deficiencies or dietary practices that may negatively affect their health, allowing for timely intervention.
3. Governments, health agencies, and faith-based organizations should organize awareness campaigns and educational programs to encourage healthy eating habits among the elderly while respecting their beliefs and traditions.



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