

## BELIEFS AND MYTHS ASSOCIATED WITH THE FRUIT CONSUMPTION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

R.A.P.T Rathnayaka<sup>1</sup>, C.A.K. Dissanayake<sup>1</sup> and I.G.G. Kasunmala<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Department of Animal and Food Sciences, Faculty of Agriculture, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka.*

<sup>2</sup>*Division of Applied and Natural Sciences, University College of Matara, University of Vocational Technology, Sri Lanka.*

Fruits, being an excellent source of nutrients, play a vital role in meeting the daily nutritional requirements of people. However, fruit consumption is often influenced by various beliefs and myths, some stemming from cultural traditions and others from misconceptions. This study aimed to identify the prevailing beliefs and myths related to fruit consumption and their impact on consumption patterns among university students. Thirty beliefs and myths were identified through key informant interviews with students, academics, health personnel, government officers and the general public. A total of 216 students were randomly selected from ten state universities with agriculture as a field of study for the main study. Data were collected through an online survey using a pre-tested Google questionnaire. The daily fruit intake of the majority (53%) of students was less than the daily recommended level of 200 g. Of the respondents, 69%, 31% and 24% consumed banana, mango and papaya respectively, as the most consumed fruits. Only 34% of respondents consumed more than two types of fruits per day. Of the 30 beliefs and myths, 63% were identified as accurate through a literature search. Only 12 beliefs (40%) were significantly associated with fruit consumption among the respondents ( $p < 0.10$ ). These beliefs were, 1. "Ethylene-treated fruits are less tasty", 2. "Pomegranates are good for many diseases", 3. "Fruits are better than fast food", 4. "Fruits with vitamin C help in weight loss", 5. "Fruits create healthy and clear skin", 6. "Eating double bananas leads to the birth of twins", 7. "Soursop is suitable to reduce bladder stones", 8. "Grapes are good for the heart", 9. "Ripe jack fruit should not be consumed in the evening", 10. "Consuming ripe jack fruit with pepper does not cause stomach-aches", 11. "Consuming too much cacao can cause constipation", and 12. "Eating *amban* and *kolikuttu* bananas may cause weight gain". In conclusion, university students' eating habits are associated with beliefs and myths about fruit consumption.

**Keywords:** Cultural, Nutrients, Recommended level