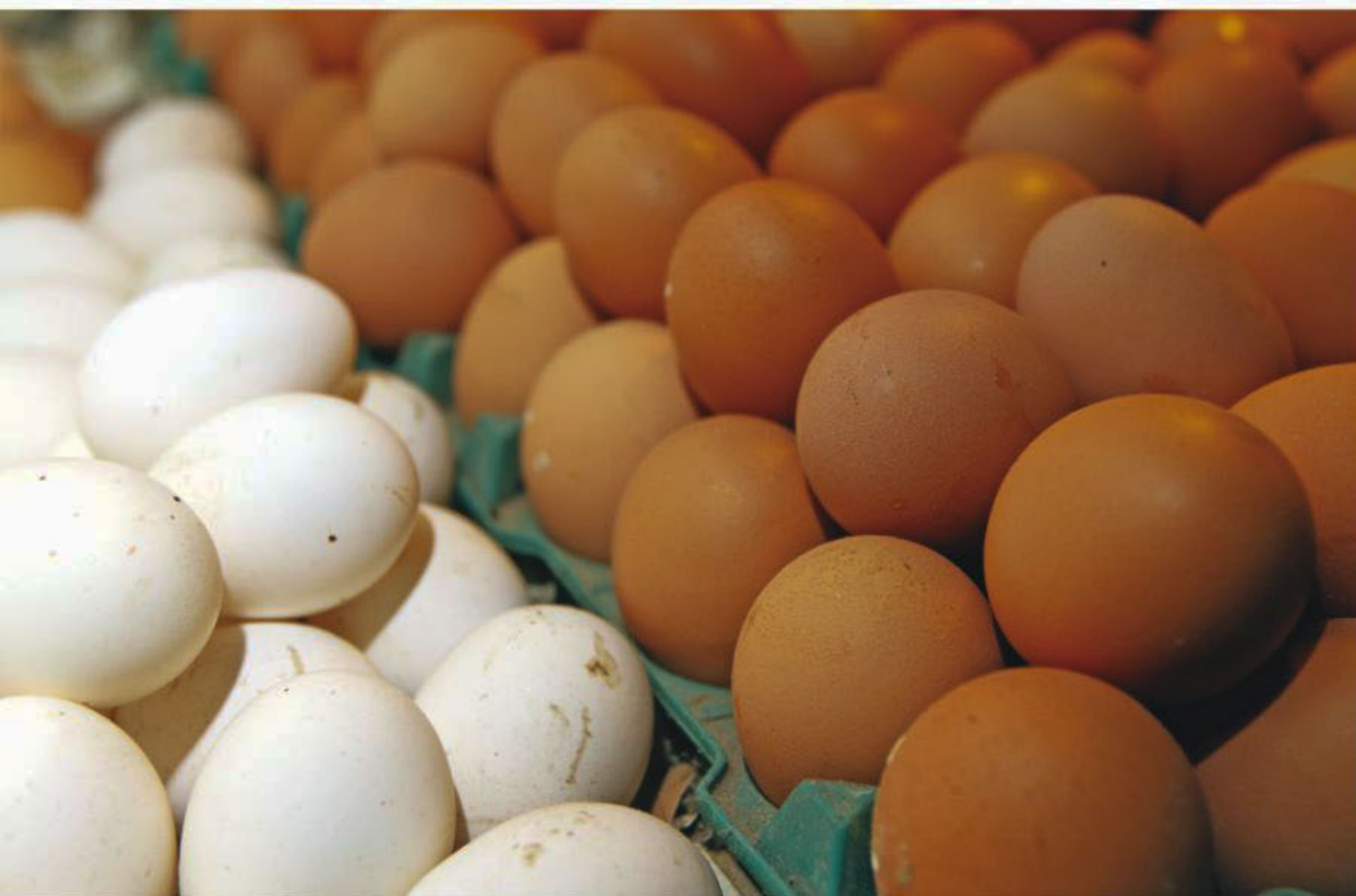


You'll not meet a Bangladeshi ready to pass up free food. In fact, Bangladeshis don't really mind paying for their food, either. As long as we get to eat and feed others, we are a happy bunch. However, our connection to food is limited to just the taste buds. We don't know (or to be succinct, don't want to know) about the things that go in our mouths. It tastes fine? Good enough – in you go! In a world that's seeking good health and fitness almost obsessively, Bangladesh remains strangely unaware, adopting a *laissez faire* attitude to eating and lifestyle.

"Nutrients are the most necessary elements of every food. Unfortunately people in Bangladesh don't have enough knowledge about nutrient intake," says Professor Dr Khurshed Jahan of the Institute of Nutrition and Food Service, University of Dhaka. Nutrient needs differ from people to people, says Dr Jahan. While one person might need more carbohy-



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COURTESY: SHWAPNO



drates for the nature of their job or lifestyle, someone else might require to have meals that are rich in protein, she says, adding that most people in the country are not even aware of what food type is best suited to their body.

While there are some who will eat anything that is somewhat edible, there are many who believe that starving yourself or following every kind of diet fad will help you stay fit and slim. Falser words were never

said. Low-carb diets like the cabbage soup diet or raw food diet focus on a particular food, ruling out entire food groups. "It's imperative for human beings to eat from a variety of food groups, starting from carbohydrates, proteins, fats, micro-nutrients like fruits and vegetables and minerals," says Dr Jahan. "If you want to have a balanced diet, you should make sure that your meals incorporate most of them, if not all."

The myth that fats makes you fat is just that – a myth. A big, fat lie. It depends on the type of fats that you are consuming, believes renowned architect, filmmaker, now a diehard fitness activist Moshuiddin Shaker. Instead of snacking on greasy foods like chips or *chanachur*, which contain fats that increase cholesterol and your weight, we could opt for food items like nuts that contain monounsaturated fats – the 'good fats' that boost your health and well-being.

However, people should be wary of trans and satu-

rated fats that can cause degenerative diseases, says Shaker. "Packaged foods, fried foods, microwave popcorn, candy bars, pastries – these food items are high on trans fat and should duly be avoided," he adds. Why exactly is trans-fat harmful? When a normal fat molecule is twisted during a process called hydrogenation, whereby liquid vegetable oil is heated and combines with hydrogen gas to ensure longevity, trans-fat is formed.

Animal fats, on the other hand, are the basic source of saturated fats. So instead of having butter in your food plan, you could use olive oil. "We often use soybean oil for our cooking purposes," says Shaker. "The commercial soybean oil is particularly harmful as in order to increase production, excessive pressure is applied on the soybean in the industrial process, which hampers the original molecular form of the bean." This can lead to terrible health consequences that you won't even be aware of until it's too late, he adds.

Fast food, thus, is a definite no-no. "Most restaurants in Bangladesh tend to reheat the oil that they use several times," says Dr Jahan. Reheating oil repeatedly, she adds, destroys the oil's beneficial antioxidants and



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Avoid greasy, deep fried food.

forms compounds that can be harmful for the body. "You shouldn't heat oil until it's smoking, that's one of the worst mistakes you can make. Just heat it until you see the oil flickering," says Dr Jahan.

Both Dr Jahan and Moshuiddin Shaker believe that the traditional use of mustard oil can be a better alternative to the more commonly used soybean oil that's

Foods High in Saturated Fats



- High-fat cuts of red meat (beef, lamb)
- Chicken with the skin on
- Whole-fat dairy products like milk and cream
- Coconut Meat
- Butter
- Cheese
- Hydrogenated Oil (Palm Oil)
- Processed Meat

used in most urban households now. Mustard oil is produced using a cold process and has 60 percent monounsaturated fatty acids and 21 percent polyunsaturated fatty acids (the good fats) and only about 12 percent saturated fats. These 'good fats' don't get deposited on arterial walls of your heart, thus reducing the chance of heart diseases. "Mustard oil, especially the locally produced ones, is easily available and quite affordable. A small amount is all you need to cook your food and thus, your oil intake is also reduced," adds Shaker.

Another good, albeit a bit expensive alternative, is olive oil. The belief that olive oil is safe for cooking and high temperature frying is supported by various scientists and research organisations. The scientific journal established in 1953 by the American Chemi

Foods High in Refined Sugar



- White flour
- Sauces (Teriyaki sauce, chilli sauce, barbecue sauce)
- Cereals
- Jams and preserves
- Candies, cookies and cakes
- Soft/aerated drinks and powdered drinks
- Syrups and artificial sweeteners
- Canned fruit

Foods High in Salt



- Tomato Ketchup
- Cheese
- Prawns
- Salted nuts
- Breakfast cereals
- Chips
- Soy sauce
- Yeast extract
- Stock cubes (chicken or vegetable stocks)
- Baking soda
- Instant soups (or any other instant food)
- Canned vegetables (sweet corn, mushrooms, peas, sun dried tomatoes)