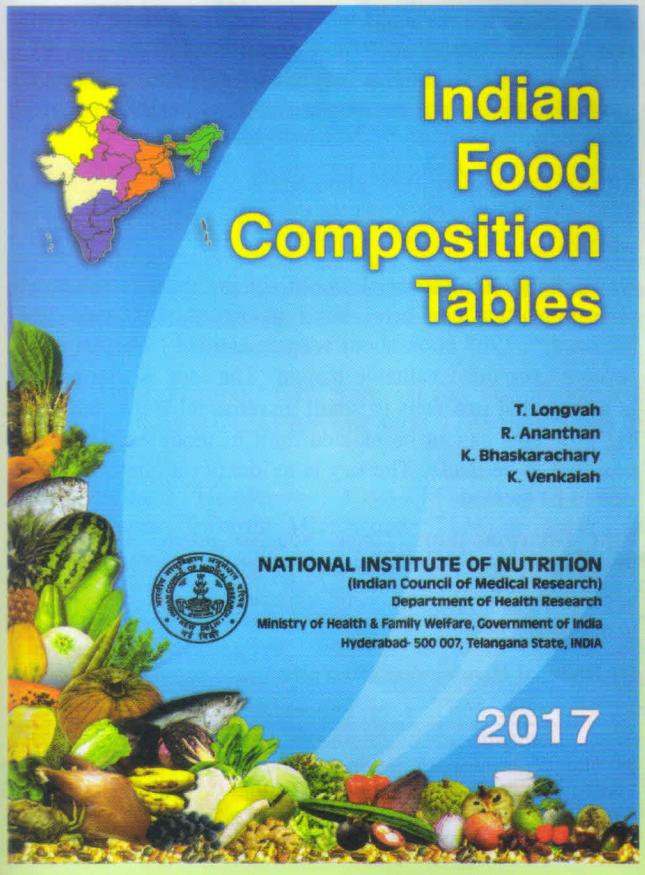
Indian Food Composition Tables (IFCT)

WE all know adequate nutrition is important for good health, and being aware of what we consume is equally important. However, keeping the food database updated regularly is challenging because a sustainable food composition database is not possible due to a non-exhaustive list of food consumed throughout the country. This is because of the vast array of food consumed across different regions and cultures. Hence, maintaining uniformity in the database seems impossible as there's always a possibility of new additions. Consequently, the food database must be updated regularly to reflect the current scenario.

The National Institute of Nutrition (NIN), under the aegis of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), Hyderabad, is one of the oldest research centres in the country, known for public health, nutrition, and translational research. The institute has been constantly involved in updating the Indian food composition tables since the groundbreaking food nutrient profiling began in the year 1937.



Indian Food Composition Tables — 2017, a book by NIN, provides nutritional information on 528 important foods categorised into 20 food groups based on 151 distinct food constituents. Food groups comprise cereals and millets, grain legumes, green leafy vegetables, other vegetables, fruits, roots and tubers, condiments and spices, nuts and oil seeds, sugars, mushrooms, miscellaneous foods, milk and milk products, egg and egg products, poultry, animal meat, marine fish, marine shellfish, marine mollusks, freshwater fish and shellfish, and edible oils and fats. Except for poultry and egg, the database of all food components is for foods in their raw form. The food constituents fall under the following categories: dietary fibre, water-soluble vitamins, fat-soluble vitamins, carotenoids, mineral and trace elements, starch and individual sugars, fatty acid profile, fatty acid profile of edible fats and oils, organic acids, polyphenols, oligosaccharides, phytosterols, saponins and phytates, and amino acid profile, molecules that form proteins responsible for growth and repair of body cells and tissues. Moreover, the pictorial description of foods we consume daily is an interesting value addition to this database.

To provide comprehensive details, food scientists from NIN have described each food item with its common name in english, scientific name, and photo of the food sample. The foods are arranged alphabetically to avoid any confusion and make identification easy. Besides, food names are listed in regional languages of India — Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Telugu and Urdu, making them compliant with regional requirements. In the case of animal-sourced foods, specific body parts are analysed. Every food analysed has a unique four-character alphanumeric code for identification, making tracking easy.

With growing concerns about health and nutrient intake, ensuring that we consume adequate nutrients is crucial. To maintain good health, we must list down all the food constituents, keeping a constant check on the consumption of essential nutrients systematically. One of the leading national dailies, *India Today News*, in July 2023 stated, "According to a joint report by FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO, in comparison to 42.1 per cent of the global population, 74.1 per cent of the Indian population cannot afford healthy food." Therefore, food composition databases with collected data on nutritional food content hold importance.

Food composition tables have several applications, including developing dietary guidance for individuals and