

Nutrition Research Seminar: Global Evidence, Asian Insights, and Future Directions

Chaired by Prof. Jordi Salas-Salvadó, this session offered compelling new insights into the health benefits of nut and dried fruit consumption. Guest speaker Dr. Sangeetha Shyam presented emerging clinical evidence from Asia, highlighting the region's unique nutritional challenges—and the opportunities for nuts to support healthier diets.



Prof. Jordi Salas-Salvadó.



Dr. Sangeetha Shyam.

“Studies in Asia have shown that eating nuts as pre-meal snacks leads to improved cardiometabolic profiles in adults with prediabetes.”

Prof. Jordi Salas-Salvadó, Chair of the INC World Forum for Nutrition Research and Dissemination, opened the Nutrition Research Seminar with an overview of the INC-funded NUTPOOL study, a landmark global meta-analysis pooling data from nearly one million participants across more than two dozen cohorts from around the globe. With its broad geographic scope and rigorous methodology, this project aims to generate rigorous evidence on the role of nut consumption in preventing non-communicable diseases, which could help shape future public health recommendations and dietary guidelines worldwide. Prof. Salas-Salvadó then reviewed the year's most significant nutrition studies involving nuts and dried fruits.

Dr. Sangeetha Shyam, Miguel Servet Investigator at the Pere Virgili Health Research Institute in Spain, focused on the role of nuts in improving diet quality and health across Asia. She outlined the region's rapid economic growth, urbanization, and ongoing “nutrition transition,” which has resulted in a troubling coexistence of undernutrition, overnutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, and rising obesity.

Focusing on Malaysia in particular, Dr. Shyam described a shift from traditional diets toward highly processed, Westernized eating patterns. Across all age groups, diet quality remains poor, with excessive meat, salt, and sugar and insufficient intake of nuts, fruits, legumes, and vegetables. Surprisingly, no dominant dietary pattern in the region was linked to a healthier weight profile.

Dr. Shyam emphasized that Asian dietary responses may differ from Western ones, yet regional food-based dietary guidelines rarely include nuts—or do so with vague or inconsistent recommendations. Evidence gaps are partly to blame. She reviewed recent randomized controlled trials from India, where almonds or pistachios were consumed as pre-meal snacks in adults with prediabetes. The studies reported improved glycemic control and lipid profiles, as well as reduced central obesity.

Despite these promising findings, the evidence base remains thin. Only a handful of quality nut-related randomized controlled trials have been conducted in Asia, and data from prospective cohorts are limited. Dr. Shyam called for expanded regional research—including harmonized, comparative studies—to build culturally relevant recommendations.

With Asia home to over half the world's population, tailored research is not just beneficial—it's essential. Strengthening the evidence base could unlock the potential of nuts as a simple, accessible tool to improve health outcomes in one of the world's most dynamic and nutritionally diverse regions. 🌱