

Holistic Nutrition for Child-health and Well-being

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BE it nations, states, or families, after satisfying their respective basic needs, the top priority on their list is the health and well-being of their citizens. A large chunk of the Health and Welfare Budget is reserved for the most vulnerable group — mothers and children. Children, as future citizens, deserve more attention. UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Fund), WHO, and many other institutions are working tirelessly on the global level to ensure the health and well-being of children. The Indian Government, too, has formulated policies and programmes to ensure the holistic health of children, and they are being implemented with vigour. Sadly, the targets are nowhere in sight. UNICEF Nutrition Strategy 2020-2030 mentions that ‘*in 2020 the issue of the burden of malnutrition remains unresolved and about 200 million children are affected.*’ The causes have to be identified, and the remedies must be implemented to ensure holistic nutrition.

The Three Scourges of Child Nutrition

- 1. Undernutrition:** leading to stunting and wasting. Wasting is the most life-threatening form of malnutrition. It affects 6.7% or about 45.5 million children under five.
- 2. Widespread micronutrient deficiency:** at least 1 in 2 children suffers from micronutrient deficiency (also called hidden hunger). About 340 million children under 5 suffer from one or more micronutrient deficiencies,

including deficiency of vit. A, vit. B complex, iron, iodine, zinc, etc., adversely affect children’s health, overall growth and development.

3. Growing prevalence of overweight and obesity:

According to a WHO News release on 4 March 2022, the number of overweight children was around 120 million.

The recent Report of UNICEF, “*Fed to Fail 2021: Child Nutrition Report — The Crisis of Children’s Diets in Early Life*”, has also raised the alarm about child malnutrition. Similar findings for Indian children are reflected in the ICMR-NIN Dietary Guidelines for Indians 2024. NIN (National Institute of Nutrition, Hyderabad, India) has called for special attention to nutritionally vulnerable segments — children (age group 0-18 years with sub-groups), pregnant and lactating women, and the elderly. It has listed 17 guidelines for proper nutrition, health promotion and disease prevention across all age groups, with special emphasis on children.

According to UNICEF, the nutrition situation is being negatively affected globally by new forces like globalisation, urbanisation, socio-economic inequities, environmental crisis, wars and conflicts. Globalisation and urbanisation have changed the traditional nutritional culture and dietary patterns of families. Families have shifted to unfamiliar diets, fast-food-style meals and convenience foods. This combined with the obesogenic environment, has increased diabetes and