

## **Need For Ensuring Nutritional Diet for Children**

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### **1.1. Introduction**

The children are the most vulnerable group of the community majority comes under the vagaries of malnutrition. Adequate intake of nutrients and maintenance of good health must be ensured during childhood if not, malnutrition sets in hence forth leading to treatment of simple ailments like breathing problems, cold, cough and wounds. A child who is in a state of good health will be happy active, creative, alert and bright. A good health and a good diet is the outcome of good nutrition leading to happiness.

**KEY WORDS: Food, Children, Malnutrition**

### **1.2. Present Status**

Today, millions of people leave their homes in a protracted and often fuddle search for healthy food for their families. Many walk out of their front doors and see nothing but fast-food outlets and malls selling high-fat, high-sugar processed foods; others see no food vendors of any kind. Without affordable fresh food options, especially fruit and vegetables, adults and children face fundamental challenges to making the healthy food choices that are essential for nutritious & balanced diets. With no grocery stores and other viable fruit and vegetable merchants, neighborhoods lack a critical ingredient of vibrant, livable communities: quality food retailers that create jobs, stimulate food traffic, and bolster local commerce.

While illness can cause malnutrition, malnourished children are more at risk of contracting illnesses such as diarrhea, malaria and pneumonia. Their growth is more likely to be stunted. Malnourished females are more likely to give birth to low birth-weight offspring, contributing to a multi-generational cycle of malnutrition. Impaired cognitive function leads to lower educational performance and economic productivity, which means that child under nutrition, hinders economic development.

### **1.3. Malnutrition of Infant and Children**

The infants should receive the highest priority in any developmental programme because the progress and prosperity of a country depends on the care taken of the children. Malnutrition is very common in India not only among poor families who cannot afford to buy food but also among the well to do families. Because of ignorance and superstitions, they do not give the infants proper food. Sometimes children get enough energy from starchy foods such as fried and junk foods, requirement of proteins and other nutrients are absent which lead them to develop signs of nutritional deficiencies. Body measurements are simple but reliable and objective indices of nutritional status.

Malnutrition in children stunts physical growth, impairs mental ability and leads to poor education and low productivity. Malnourished children are shorter than what they should be, of their age. Poor linear growth during childhood and failure to maximize genetic potential are often associated with impaired cognitive development and behavioral abnormalities. It is estimated that 226 million children in India are stunted as poor nutrition in school age, seriously compromise their health and well being. Improvements in the nutrition of the child are desirable not only for its expected impact on physical growth but also to reduce the risk and consequences of infection.

There is lack of proper health education, prevailing due to poverty, faulty feeding habits and irrational beliefs aggravating the health and nutritious status of these under privileged

children in India. There should be proper ensuring of food to such places wherein the children of the urban group crave much for junk food and snacks which cause a lot of health problems. The most common is the potato chips of Lays Company which is very harmful.

#### **1.4. Food Habits- Pros & Cons**

Regarding food fads and beliefs, pulses were not given to young children because they believed that pulses caused gas production and digestive disturbances. Curd was considered a cold food for young children. Recent years have witnessed a spurt in the growth of fast foods otherwise known as convenience foods, triggered by increasing urbanization and industrialization. More and more people are going for instant and ready to eat foods. The phenomenon of the "Working Women" has given rise to a growing middle class, which has increasingly started switching to processed, packed and ready to eat foods. It is estimated that over 10 per cent of total expenditure incurred in the household for foods is spent for snack foods.

Snacks are eaten by over 75% of adolescents and provide from a fourth to third of their calorie intake. The extent to which snacks contribute to the intake of other nutrients, relate to the nature of the snacks. It is not true that all convenience foods are Junk, Foods that contribute more caloric than nutrients in a diet can be labeled as a junk food. It has been observed that fried products form the largest group of convenience snack foods marketed in India. A large number of fried items are made from wheat, bengal gram, black gram and rice. Since snacks are mostly prepared in small-scale level and therefore shop to shop and perhaps batch to batch variation are quite high therefore the ingredients and proportions are also variable.

Nutrition in public health status has led to increased or growing demand for knowledge of the nutrient content of these convenience foods. All the products were found crispy as the moisture content was low. Low moisture content of the product does not support any microbial proliferation and therefore the product remains stable for a long time. Fat influences the crispness and texture of the snack foods. If not fried in the reheated or low quality oil, which may impart rancidity to the product, it provides the shelf stability to the product.

Poor child nutrition is closely associated with poverty. A third of the world's children under five years old are undernourished. Lack of proper food can lead to learning disabilities, blindness, hearing loss, impaired brain development and low resistance to disease. Deficiencies in iodine, iron, and Vitamin A cause considerable disability. The degree of disability depends on the severity of undernourishment and the stage in the child's development at which it occurs.

Although their growth is slower than in infancy, school going children still have high nutritional needs but fairly small appetites. So it's crucial that all meals and snacks continue to be rich in nutrients and energy. The food choices which children make during the crucial years of development can influence their future health risk and also influence food habits in later life. A structured eating plan with regular meals and snacks is important to establish good eating habits. For a change on occasionally it is fine to taste burger or chips amongst the variety available but not for every meal. A limited number of foods make it difficult to obtain the full range of nutrients which one must make sure that one's child has a range of foods based on each of the main food groups.

#### **Improving Access to Food**

##### **Energy**

School children still have a high energy requirement for growth and activity, but the data shows more of them becoming overweight. This is because they're eating too many

calories and not being active enough to use up the extra energy they've eaten. An overweight child still needs a nutrient-packed diet that provides all the essential building blocks for growth and development, encouraging healthy eating should ensure children to maintain a healthy weight. Make sure that the whole family is eating healthily to provide good role models.

### **Calcium**

This mineral is important for healthy bone development. Good sources include dairy products such as milk, cheese, yoghurt and from age fraise, as well as fortified orange juice, green leafy vegetables, cereals, sesame seeds and tofu.

### **Folate**

This vitamin is important for growth of children whose intake is low especially to those who skip breakfast because fortified cereals are a good source of folate. Other sources include bread, green leafy vegetables and pulses.

### **Iron**

This mineral helps to keep red blood cells healthy. Insufficient iron intake can lead to iron-deficiency anemia, but this is much less common in primary school children than their younger and older siblings. Good sources of iron include red meat, liver, fortified breakfast cereals, beans and pulses. To help absorb the iron more effectively from non-meat sources, combine it with vitamin rich foods such as citrus fruits and fruit juice.

### **Fatty and sugary foods**

This group includes spreading fats (such as butter), cooking oils, sugar, biscuits, cakes, crisps, sweets, cream and ice-cream, chocolate and sugary drinks. These foods shouldn't be eaten regularly often and, when they are, should only be consumed in small amounts because they are loaded with calories, fat and sugar, and don't necessarily contain many vitamins and minerals. Also, sugary foods and drinks (including fruit juice) can increase the risk of dental decay. Limit the amount of sugar and sweets eaten, and offer them at the end of meals, rather than in-between for some sugar-free or diet drinks can also cause decay because of their acidity. Milk or water is the best drink between meals.

### **Conclusion**

Children are the most valuable asset for any society. Even though they are the builders of the future of any nation, thousands of children do not take their food properly. They are half fed, ill clad and without the usual benefits of a civilized society like education and health care and have a very poor food intake. They seemed to have had fairly adequate lunch in quantity but less of dinner and breakfast as they consume a lot of snacks. Consumption of cereals, pulses, leafy vegetables, and milk and milk products is grossly deficient in their dietaries. Only negligible amounts of Protective foods are consumed by these children. Micronutrient malnutrition often occurs when diets lack variety.

Every year about 15000 children are added to this number due to the lack of balanced diets, medical facilities, ignorance, poverty and illiteracy. Children suffer a lot if their nutrition is not taken care at this particular period, they become stunted in growth. Children attending school and colleges often skip their breakfast and consume inadequate ill planned lunches. Provision of lunches in the elementary schools, helps in improving the nutritional status, attendance, class performance and social development of children.

Malnutrition is highly prevalent in our country. The magnitude and extent of under nutrition varies from region to region, depending upon the availability of food resources and employment opportunities. In India, 51 per cent of all children below five years are

undernourished. Approximately 36 per cent of children born in India are of Low Birth Weight resulting in prenatal malnutrition. The study undertaken by National Family Health Survey found that almost half of children, under three were severely underweight for 18%. At least, one in five children was under weight in every State. Forty six per cent were stunted in their height for age.

School going children are the most important segment of society. Good nutrition of the children is indispensable component of healthy life. Only by being healthy, a child can attain a healthy mind and a healthy body. To bind a healthy body, children should be given nutritious food. Children from rural areas are much affected with insufficient availability of food.

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