



Strategies to prevent malnutrition and improve nutrition

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There are two major approaches in addressing malnutrition.

- Nutritional planning
- Direct nutrition and health development

Nutritional planning

This involves political commitment by the government. A well planned and well executed long term project can accelerate the developmental process and the benefits can be rewarding and permanent.

Nutritional planning involves formulation of a nutrition policy and overall long term planning to improve production and supplies of food, ensure its equitable distribution and programs to increase the purchasing power of people. This may include, land reforms, proper guidance in agriculture to help farmers to get better yields from their lands, help in proper marketing of farm produce. To help increasing the capacity of people to buy nutritious food in adequate quantity, income generating activities for the weaker sections of the community, making available good quality food in affordable prices through proper public distribution system, etc are some of the plans for the government to implement.

Direct nutrition and health interventions

Improved health care system

Infections like malaria, measles and diarrhea are prevalent in our society and they precipitate acute malnutrition among children and infants. A good health care system that provides immunization, oral rehydration, periodic deworming, early diagnosis and proper treatment of common illnesses can go a long way in preventing malnutrition in the society.

Nutrition education

People can be educated on

- The nutritional quality of common foods
- Importance and nutritional quality of various locally available and culturally accepted low

cost foods

- Importance of exclusive breastfeeding for six months and continuing to breast feed up to two years or beyond.
- Damage caused by irrational beliefs and cultural practices of feeding
- Recipes for preparing proper weaning foods and good supplementary food from locally available low cost foods.
- Importance of including milk, eggs, meat or pulses in sufficient quantities in the diet to enhance the net dietary protein value.
- Importance of feeding children and adults during illness
- Importance and advantages of growing a kitchen garden
- Importance of immunizing their children and following proper sanitation in their day to day life.

Early detection of malnutrition and intervention

- The longer the developmental delays remain uncorrected, the greater the chance of permanent effects and hence intervention must occur during pregnancy and first three years of life.
- A well recorded growth chart can detect malnutrition very early. Velocity of growth is more important than the actual weight at a given time
- If growth of the child is slowed or is arrested as shown by flat curve on the growth card, physician should be alerted and any hidden infection or any reason for nutritional deficiency must be evaluated and taken care of.
- If growth chart is not maintained, anthropometric indices like, weight, height mid arm circumference, and chest circumference etc. can be measured and used for evaluation of nutrition.

Nutrition supplementation

Usually, biologically vulnerable groups like pregnant women, infants, preschool going and school going children are targeted by various welfare measures conducted by the government. Calories, proteins and micronutrients like iron, vitamin A and zinc can be supplemented.

Objective of nutrition supplementation of infants and children includes

- To treat and rehabilitate severely malnourished subjects .
- Improve the general health and wellbeing of children, increase the resistance to infectious illnesses and thereby decrease morbidity,
- Accelerate the physical growth and mental development of children
- Improve the academic performance and learning abilities of children.

Objective of supplementing pregnant and lactating women include

- Preventing anemia in the mother thus improving her health and the pregnancy outcome.
- Improving calorie intake and prevent low birth weight baby, thus breaking the vicious cycle of intergenerational cycle of growth failure.
- Supplementing calcium to prevent osteoporosis.

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