

Let us build a healthy society

Well organized preventive and curative health services, good social and economic backgrounds and a clean environment are essential for having a healthy society. While it is important that people should be free from disease and deformity their physical, mental and social well-being are equally important.

In our previous lessons, we learnt how to improve and maintain our health.

Now it is time for us to go further and study what is meant by 'total health' and the factors that influence it. We will also learn about identifying suitable life styles to maintain total health, challenges to current health conditions and ways of overcoming them. This knowledge will help us build a healthy society.

Concept of total health

According to the World Health Organization (WHO),

Total health is not only being free from diseases and disabilities, but also having physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being.

Thus, 'total health' does not merely mean being free from diseases and disabilities.

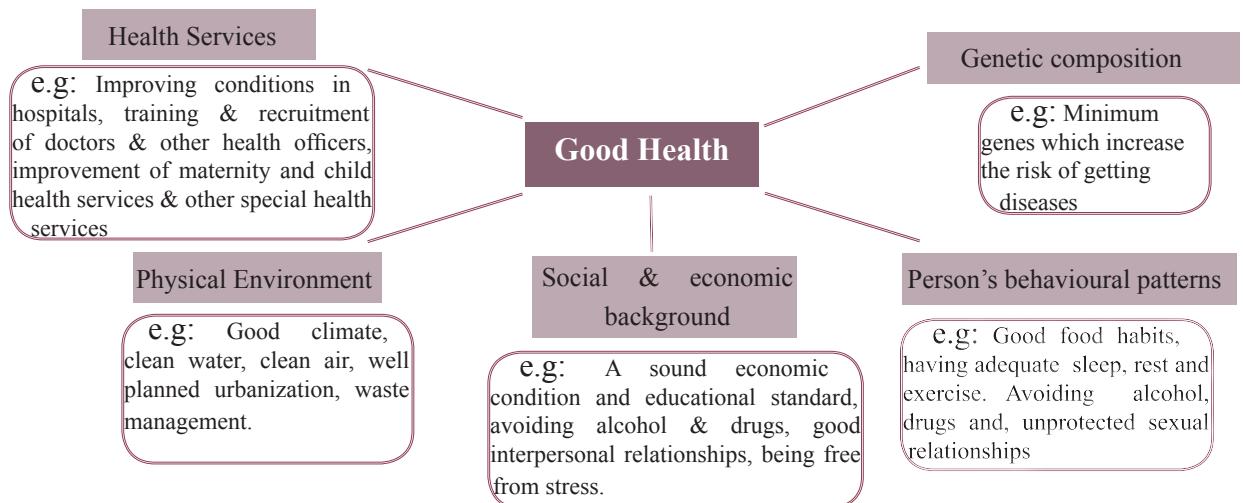
The factors influencing total health.

Total health depends on many factors. By engaging in physical educational activities one can develop all four constituents of total health, namely, physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being. By engaging in exercises and sports one can improve the health as well as the efficiency of various systems in the body. Similarly, engaging in team sports help in the improvement of the mental, social and spiritual aspect, of one's personality.

Although one can change his or her behaviour and certain elements in his/her physical environment, factors such as health services and effects of urbanization depend on the national policies of the local or central government. We have a

responsibility and a duty to change national policies according to the prevailing needs of the society.

Diagram 1.1 - Factors influencing health



Suitable life style to maintain total health

Our behaviour and life style has a great influence on our health. A few important life styles that will help to achieve total health are given below:

1. Good eating habits
2. Active life style and exercise
3. Maintaining an appropriate BMI
4. Adequate sleep and rest
5. Leading a simple life style
6. Stress management
7. Avoiding alcohol, drugs and smoking
8. Following accepted rules and regulations.

Good eating habits, an active life style and exercise help to maintain the BMI within a healthy range. This helps to improve one's physical and mental fitness as well as to reduce one's vulnerability to non-communicable diseases.

1. Good eating habits

Correct proportions of food from the following groups should be included in the diet to get the required nutrients to maintain total health.

- Grains (cereals) and tubers (yams)
- Vegetables
- Fruits
- Fish, meat, eggs and grains
- Milk and other dairy products
- Seeds rich in fat

(Good eating habits are explained in detail in chapter seven.)

2. Active life style and exercise

One can prevent getting non-communicable diseases like cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke and maintain mental and physical fitness by engaging in daily physical exercises. Adults and children should engage in daily physical exercise for 30 and 60 minutes respectively. Walking briskly, running, cycling, swimming or engaging in some sport are few things one can do. Apart from these regular formal exercises, we can get exercise also by walking to nearby places instead of travelling in a vehicle, taking the stairs instead of using the lift or escalator, engaging in day to day house hold activities like cleaning, gardening etc.

Not only during our youth, but at every age one should maintain an active life style and engage in regular exercise. With age it is important to engage in regular exercise and lead an active life style to maintain physical fitness.

3. Maintaining appropriate Body Mass Index (BMI)

We have learnt, in lower grades how to calculate the BMI.

$$\text{Body Mass Index} = \frac{\text{Body weight (Kg)}}{\text{Height (m)} \times \text{Height (m)}}$$

The BMI of a child varies according to the age and gender. BMI values in the 5-19 years age group is interpreted using a chart specific to each sex. BMI of a child should be maintained within the green zone.

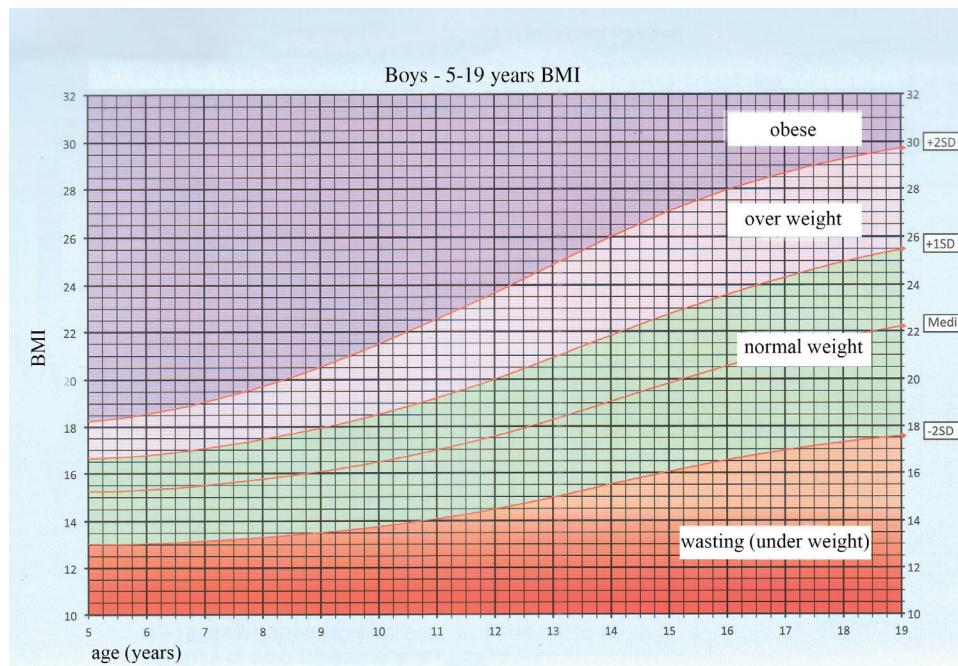


Chart 1.1

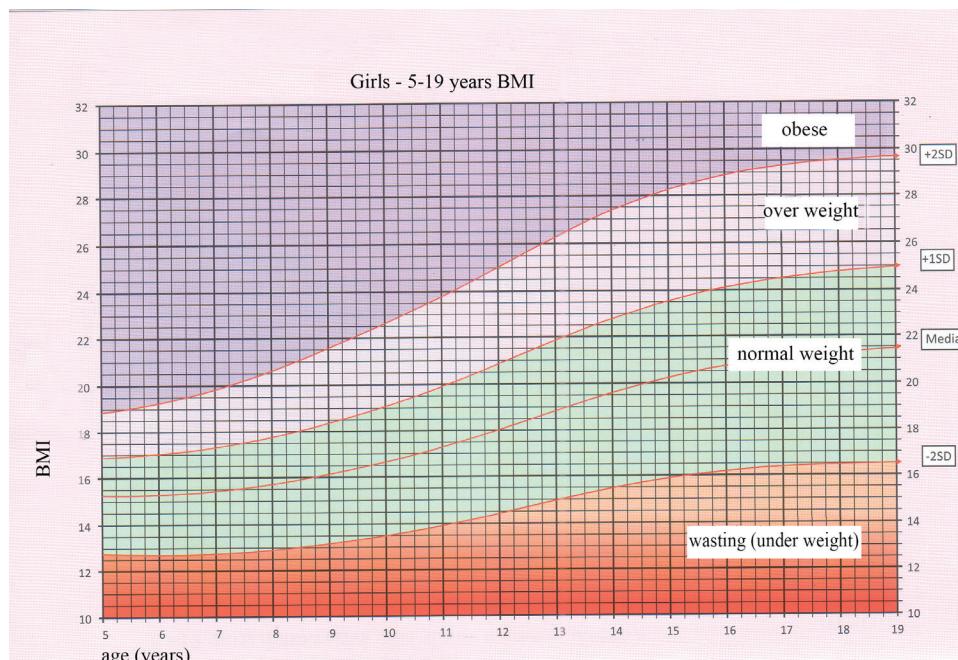


Chart 1.2

Source - WHO

Nutritional status of the individual is determined by the position where the BMI lies as given below.

Below -2SD	- (orange colour)	- wasting
Between -2SD to +1SD	- (green colour)	- normal level
Between +1SD to +2SD	- (light purple colour)	- overweight
Above +2SD	- (dark purple colour)	- obesity

BMI threshold values in adults do not vary with age and gender. The table below gives the ranges of international and asian BMI values for different nutritional status.

Table 1.1

Nutritional status	Asian measurement (kgm^{-2})	International measurement (kgm^{-2})
Wasting	< 18.5	< 18.5
Normal level	18.5 - 22.9	18.5 - 24.9
Overweight	23.0 - 26.9	25.0 - 29.9
Obesity	> 27.0	> 30.0

Being overweight and obese increase the risk of developing diabetes, high blood pressure, strokes, cancer and heart disease. Such individuals should reduce the intake of energy rich food and engage in more daily exercises.



Figure 1.1



Activity

1. Measure your height & weight and calculate your BMI.
Plot it on the gender specific graph.
2. According to your position on the BMI chart, decide your nutritional level.

4. Adequate sleep and rest

After a hard day's work sleep is important. Sleep is vital for the body to get the required rest. It is vital for the growth and development of the body. Sleep also helps us to retain what we learnt when awake. An adult needs about 8 hours of sleep daily while children need more. Inadequate sleep leads to poor concentration, sleepiness, irritability and tiredness during day time and reduces efficiency.

5. Simple life style

A simple life is a way of life that has to be decided by one's self. Being content with a modest life and not chasing after luxuries is a very important factor. Another important factor is to reducing belongings to a minimum and managing your requirements with whatever you have. This concept was promoted by Mahatma Ghandi at the beginning of the last century.

6. Stress Management

Stress is how one reacts to a challenge. This differs from person to person. While one may get stressed over an examination another may not. When we encounter a challenging situation, our level of stress increases and this will help us to face the encountered challenge effectively in day to day life. Stress will also improve our efficiency some times. Long term stress could affect our health adversely. It could lead to poor mental and physical states. Looking for reasons for stress, expressing feelings, looking at the problems in different ways, proper time management are some ways that could be adopted to relieve stress. Adopting a simple life style helps to lead a stress free life. (The reasons for stress and ways to overcome them are explained in length in chapter 9.2)

7. Avoiding alcohol, drugs and smoking

Use of alcohol, drugs and tobacco is a great hazard to both physical and mental health. It also hinders social well-being and financial status. Research has shown that about 50% of the income of lower income families is spent on alcohol, drugs and tobacco.

Youth are attracted to abuse illicit substances. This is due to the image that has been portrayed about its use. Companies use attractive advertisements creating a good image for these products through the media. For example, using high profile figures such as athletes at public gatherings like games, incorporating scenes that use cigarettes and alcohol in movies are subtle ways used to promote and build an image of the product. Such advertisements as well as scenes in movies are banned in Sri Lanka for public viewing.

Peer group influence too, plays a major role in starting to use alcohol, drugs and tobacco.

Measures that can be taken to prevent the use of drugs, alcohol and smoking:

- Increasing the price of cigarettes and alcohol
- Limiting the places selling them
- Advertising of alcohol and cigarettes to be banned
- Taking effective legal action on the use and trafficking of illicit drugs
- Conducting awareness programmes for the public on adverse effects of smoking on health and socioeconomic effects
- Change the image that the society has placed on these items
e.g: pictorial depiction of harmful effects of smoking on the cover of the carton
- Cigarettes and alcohol to be sold only to adults

8. Obeying laws

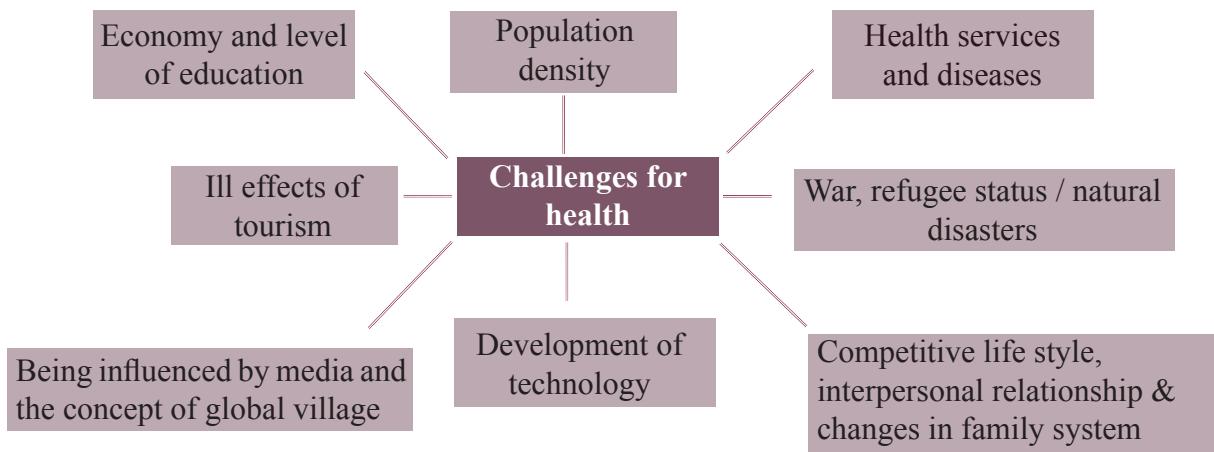
There are laws, rules and regulations introduced to enhance and protect public safety, public health and the general well-being of the public. You must always observe them and resist any temptation to act in breach of them. Respecting such laws, rules and regulations and norms is beneficial to everyone. During adolescence there could be peer pressure to break rules and regulations. For example, using seat belts in a vehicle and wearing helmets are few rules that are taken lightly by youth. Not following these rules could result in major casualties including death. Driving at high speeds and driving under the influence of alcohol are two main reasons for road accidents. Although smoking is prohibited in public places, some break this law and create a health hazard to others as well.

Promiscuous sexual conduct can expose one to the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies. Due to illegal abortions a large number of females get infections, become sub-fertile and even die.

Challenges to maintaining total health

As we have mentioned before an individual's health depends on his or her genes and behaviour, the physical, social and economic factors affecting him or her and the health available services. In this section we will find out how physical, social and economic factors affect our health.

Diagram 1.2 - Challenges to maintaining total health.



Economy and the level of education



Figure 1.2

A country's economic status and the level of education of the public affect the health status of a country. This has a great impact on its economic development. Factors such as income, nutrition, clean drinking water, sanitation, spacious and well ventilated houses and availability of medical facilities are important for health. These factors are determined by the economic status of the individual as well as

the country.

The level of education of the community has a direct impact on health. Sri Lanka is a middle income country but it has a very low infant death rate and high life expectancy rate.

Health services and diseases



Figure 1.3

The other important factor to maintain good health standards in Sri Lanka is the high quality of medical services that are provided free of charge by the government of Sri Lanka through a network of hospitals and M.O.H. offices across the country. The national immunization programme, school health services, maternity clinics and the services provided by public health midwife (P.H.M.) and public health inspector (P.H.I.) have helped to improve the health status of Sri Lankans. The certification of a healthy environment when building a home can be a part of the programme.

Due to the development of medical science, the health services have improved and infectious disease are under control but bad eating habits and inadequate exercise have led to an increase in obesity. This has resulted in a rapid increase of non-communicable disease such as diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and strokes. The elderly population in Sri Lanka is also increasing. Due to these reasons the health service is facing a huge challenge at present.

Internally displaced due to war and natural disasters



Figure 1.4

Many obstacles arise when providing health services in areas affected by war or natural disasters. These situations have a great impact on the mental health and social well-being of those who are internally displaced.

Competitive life style and interpersonal relationship

The present education system and job opportunities are very competitive. Due to this reason people have no time to enjoy life and the leisure time has been reduced, leading to increased stress. Due to lack of time family bonds and inter personal relationships have weakened.

Development of technology

Technological innovations have helped human kind immensely. Innovations in the medical field are of a very high standard. Although technology has made our daily life comfortable and easy, it also has made us lazy. We hardly exert ourselves and as a result, non-communicable diseases are increasing.

Influence of the media and the concept of global village

The media and the internet have a great impact on our behaviour and beliefs. Commercial advertisements may at times have a bad influence on us. Unhealthy food advertisements can have a bad influence on children. Watching television, using computers and spending more time at computer games can adversely affect the mental and physical health of both children and adults.

The media can be used for the betterment of human kind. It can be used to make the public aware of diseases, unhealthy lifestyles and bad practices happening in the society.



Figure 1.5

With the development in the fields of transport, media and the internet the whole world has become a global village. So both good and bad lifestyles spread across the world within a short span of time,

Influence of the tourism industry

Tourism helps to build ties between countries and nations, generates foreign exchange and improves infrastructure. Tourism can also have negative effects such as environmental pollution, increase in adverse situations like prostitution and spread of sexually transmitted diseases, circulation of illicit drugs and damage the culture.



Figure 1.6

Population density

Population density is a measurement of population per unit area of land. Diseases related to respiratory and digestive systems and stress have become common due to the increase in the population density.



Activity

- Make a list of commercial advertisements that have an impact on health which are telecasted over television, broadcasted over radio and published in the newspaper during a period of one week.
- Explain the impact on health through those advertisements.

Actions to be taken to overcome challenges faced in achieving total health

1. Uplifting the educational level of the people
e.g: Making health education compulsory
2. Strengthening both preventive and curative (treatment) sectors of health service.
3. Identifying problems that are arising due to competitive lifestyles, technology, influence of media, concept of global village and take steps to increase public awareness about these and ways of overcoming them.
4. Uplifting the economic status of the people.
5. Identifying effects of increase in population density on health and finding solutions for them.
E.g: Increasing the staff in the health service sector.
Introducing housing projects with adequate sanitary facilities.
6. Organizing awareness programmes, for school children and the community in areas frequented by tourists, on possible health and social problems that would arise in these areas and find solutions and be prepared to face them.
7. Uplifting the welfare of the displaced people.
8. There must be government policy planning focused on maintaining total health.

Summary

Genetic composition, behavioural patterns, social and economic background, physical environment and health services are the main factors that affect our health. Factors that are important to achieve total health are good food habits, active life and regular exercise, maintaining appropriate BMI, adequate sleep and rest , adopting a simple life style, avoiding drugs, alcohol and smoking, reducing stress, abiding by rules, regulations and socially accepted norms. Economic status, level of education, health service, war and displacement, competitive life styles, interpersonal relationships, technology, media, diseases, changes in family bonds, concept of global village and tourism industry are the main challenges to health. We have to overcome these challenges in order to achieve a high standard of health in society.



- ### **Exercises:**
1. Name five factors which affects a person's health.
 2. Write three lifestyles which help to maintain total health.
 3. Name four challenges which affect the present health status.
 4. Mention one step that can be taken to overcome each of the challenges mentioned above.