

Dual Nutrition Burden in India

What is the issue?

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India is witnessing the emerging menace of over-nutrition along with the existing concern of high under-nutrition.

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How is under-nutrition in India?

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- Global Nutrition Report ranks India low in stunting among children aged less than five and in under-5 wasting.

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- **Micronutrient deficiency** - The burden of vitamin and mineral deficiencies, called 'hidden hunger', is also considerable.

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- This is because a vast majority of Indians eat cereal-based food, mainly wheat and rice.

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- There is an insufficient intake of food such as milk, pulses, and fruits and vegetables, which are rich sources of micronutrients.

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- **Effects** - Women and children are the most vulnerable to micronutrient deficiencies and consequently have adverse health affects.

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- Deficiency of iron in women causes reduced physical work capacity, fatigue, etc.

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- Notably it could also lead to depression and post-partum maternal haemorrhage.

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- In the case of children, the impact is felt with impairment in growth and cognitive development.

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- **Response** - In the last few decades, India has made efforts at improving the food and nutrition security of its population.

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- This was done with strides in technology, irrigation practices, extension services, and progressive agricultural policies.
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- Also, in the 1990s, deficiencies of micronutrients such as zinc, folic acid, magnesium, selenium and vitamin D received more attention.
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- However, despite an overall decrease in cases, the level of under-nutrition still remains high in comparison with world nations.
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What is the emerging concern?

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- The recent findings of the National Family Health Survey-4 (2015-16) bring out the emerging scenario of over-nutrition in India.
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- With Body Mass Index (BMI) as the measure, the survey identifies-
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- i. around 15% of urban women to be underweight and around 30% of to be overweight or obese
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- ii. around 15% of urban men in the underweight category and a 26% in the overweight and obese category
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What has led to this?

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- Lifestyle and dietary patterns have undergone dramatic changes, especially among urban sections, in the recent decades.
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- This has contributed to reduction in physical activity and an increasing prevalence of non-communicable diseases.
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- Over-nutrition is traced to be the cause for these diseases due to the imbalance between intake and activity.

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- Resultantly, over-nutrition is emerging as a concern among the urban affluent segments.

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What lies ahead?

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- India is evidently witnessing a dual nutrition burden.

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- The burden of under-nutrition among the poorer sections and that of over-nutrition among the urban well-to-do sections.

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- Promotion of appropriate lifestyles and dietary intakes for the prevention and management of over-nutrition and obesity is necessary.

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- On the other hand, to ensure food and nutrition security, there is a growing need for a multisectoral approach.

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- The policies and programmes of various ministries should be converged for better results in agricultural practices as well as in food styles.

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Source: The Hindu

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