



Mains Practice Question

Q. The double burden of undernutrition and obesity needs to be tackled as part of India's national nutrition strategy. Discuss (250 words)

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Approach

- State the facts related to double burden of malnutrition and obesity as introduction.
- What are factors responsible for double burden.
- Describe the consequences of double burden of malnutrition and obesity.
- Describe the national nutrition strategy to tackle double burden of malnutrition and obesity.
- Give conclusion.

Introduction

In India, under nutrition levels have remained persistently high especially in disadvantaged groups as reflected in:

- **UNICEF's report** - one in three malnourished child in world belongs to India, half of the children under three years old are underweight and a third of wealthiest children are over-nutrient-ed.
- The **2018 Global Hunger Index (GHI)** report ranked India 103rd out of 119 countries
- As per **NFHS reports**
 - every third woman in India was undernourished and every second woman was anemic
 - also overweight/obesity has affected almost one-fifth of urban population

Body

Reasons for malnutrition and obesity in India

- One of the major causes for malnutrition in India is economic inequality
 - Poor people lack diet both in terms of quality and quantity.
 - Low pay traps them in a vicious circle of under-nutrition.
- Societal norms of early marriages, early and multiple pregnancies that result in undernutrition and mortality of both women and children.
- Lack of education and awareness regarding role of sanitation, ideal nutrition, deficiencies, prevention of diseases etc.
- According to world bank report India loses 6% of GDP due to health caused by unhygienic sanitation
- Climate change is dragging people in poverty and thereby vicious cycle of poverty, malnutrition further deepens.
- On the other hand people are getting obese due to unhealthy lifestyle: unconventional food, sleep, physical activities
- Government expenditure in health is very low - 1.15% of GDP, which is very low when compared to similar placed economies like China , Brazil.

Impact of Malnutrition and Obesity

- Lower immunity and predisposition to higher mortality
- Malnutrition is a contributing factor in about one-third of all deaths of children under the age of 5.
- Undernourished children are at high risk of permanently stunted growth and development affecting their cognitive abilities.
- Children who are malnourished from an early age are severely disadvantaged in their ability to learn.
- Maternal undernutrition increases the risk of morbidity and death and of having undernourished babies thus increasing MMR and IMR.
- Overweight adults and children are at greater risk for non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular heart disease.
- It also brings inefficiency to the society, especially in India where labor is a major input factor for economic production.

National Nutrition Strategy and its Significance

- **Time bound outcome based approach:** The Strategy aims to **reduce all forms of malnutrition by 2030**, with a focus on the most vulnerable and critical age groups.
- **Convergence and integration of existing services:** The Strategy aims to launch a **National Nutrition Mission** enabling integration of nutrition-related interventions cutting across sectors like women and child development, health, food and public distribution, sanitation, drinking water, and rural development.
- **A decentralized approach** will be promoted with greater flexibility and decision making at the state, district and local levels e.g. ownership of Panchayati Raj institutions and urban local bodies over nutrition initiatives.
- **Focus on children and maternal care:** The Strategy proposes to launch interventions with a focus on improving healthcare and nutrition among children. Measures to improve maternal care and nutrition include supplementary nutritional support during pregnancy and lactation and health and nutrition counseling.
- **Governance reforms** envisaged in the Strategy include: implementation plans for ICDS, NHM and Swachh Bharat, focus on the most vulnerable communities in districts with the highest levels of child malnutrition.

Conclusion

- National nutrition strategy seeks to achieve the targets identified as part of the Sustainable Development Goals related to nutrition (SDG 2) and health (SDG 3).
- Nutrition is acknowledged as one of the most effective entry points for human development, poverty reduction and economic development, with high economic returns. Thus India's national nutrition strategy is significant initiative in highlighting a pressing development problem.