



P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

3. Rising Obesity and Diabetes Crisis in India – Health

The recently released National Family Health Survey-6 (NFHS-6) highlights a sharp rise in obesity and diabetes across India, signalling a growing burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). This emerging health challenge threatens India's demographic dividend by affecting the health and productivity of the working-age population. The rising prevalence reflects lifestyle changes accompanying urbanization and economic development.

1.Key Findings on Rising Obesity and Diabetes

Rising Obesity Prevalence

1. Obesity among women increased from 24% (2019-21) to 30.7% (2023-24), a significant upward trend in a short period.
2. Urban women recorded higher prevalence (42.8%) than rural women (25.5%), reflecting urban lifestyle factors.
3. Obesity among men rose from 22.9% to 27.3% during the same period with urban men (36.3%) more affected than rural men (23%).

Rising Diabetes Prevalence

1. High blood sugar prevalence among men (15+ years) increased from 15.6% to 20.9%, indicating rapid diabetes growth.
2. Urban-rural figures stood at 23.9% and 19.7% respectively, showing urban areas facing greater burden.
3. High blood sugar prevalence among women (15+ years) increased from 13.5% to 17.8% with urban women (21.9%) reporting higher prevalence than rural women (16.2%).

Urban-Rural Disparities

1. Urban areas consistently show higher prevalence of both obesity and diabetes across gender lines.
2. This reflects lifestyle differences including sedentary occupations, processed food consumption, and reduced physical activity.

2.Understanding Obesity and Diabetes

What is Obesity?

1. According to the World Health Organization, obesity is the abnormal or excessive accumulation of body fat that presents a risk to health.
2. Traditionally measured using Body Mass Index (BMI) where $BMI \geq 30$ indicates obesity.

What is Diabetes?

1. Diabetes is a chronic metabolic disorder in which the body either does not produce enough insulin or cannot effectively use the insulin it produces.
2. It results in elevated blood glucose levels causing long-term complications if unmanaged.
3. Major types include Type 1 Diabetes (autoimmune), Type 2 Diabetes (most common), and Gestational Diabetes (during pregnancy).

3.Why Rising Obesity and Diabetes is a Concern

Massive Disease Burden

1. India already has over 10 crore people living with diabetes according to the ICMR-INDIAB study, representing enormous healthcare burden.
2. The rapid increase in obesity and diabetes creates cascading health challenges.

Obesity as Risk Factor

1. Obesity is a major risk factor for diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, hypertension, stroke, and certain cancers.
2. Excessive body fat causes insulin resistance, inflammatory responses, and metabolic dysfunction.

Healthcare System Strain

1. Rising Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) increase healthcare expenditure straining limited resources.
2. NCD management requires long-term treatment, frequent hospital visits, and expensive medications.

Reduced Workforce Productivity

1. NCDs reduce workforce productivity through increased absenteeism and reduced work capacity.
2. Complications from diabetes including vision loss, kidney disease, and amputations create long-term disability.

Childhood Obesity Concerns

1. Childhood and adolescent obesity lead to lifelong health complications and higher risk of adult NCDs.
2. Early-onset obesity accelerates disease progression in adulthood.

Demographic Dividend Threat

1. The growing burden of obesity and diabetes threatens India's demographic dividend by affecting the health and productivity of the working-age population.
2. A healthy workforce is essential for economic growth and development.

4. Government Initiatives for NCD Control

National Programme for Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases (NPNCNCD)

1. Promotes health through behaviour change via community, civil society, media, and partner engagement.
2. Focus Areas include screening, early diagnosis, management, referral, and follow-up at all healthcare levels for continuous care.
3. Community health centres provide screening and basic NCD management.

Specialized Ayurvedic Care

1. The All-India Institute of Ayurveda (AIIA) offers specialized treatments for obesity and related lifestyle disorders.
2. Ayurvedic approaches emphasize dietary modification, herbal remedies, and lifestyle adjustments.

Ayurswasthya Yojana

1. The Central Sector Scheme aims at promoting AYUSH interventions in community healthcare.
2. It supports projects focused on managing lifestyle disorders and non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

POSHAN Abhiyaan - Preventing Childhood Obesity

1. Launched in 2018, aiming to improve nutritional outcomes for children, adolescent girls, pregnant women, and lactating mothers.

2. Fosters convergent ecosystem enhancing nutrition content, delivery, and awareness to combat malnutrition and promote overall wellness.

Fit India Movement – Mass Fitness Revolution

1. Launched in 2019, it promotes active lifestyles encouraging individuals to incorporate fitness into daily routines.
2. Fit India School Certification incorporates physical activity in school curriculum.
3. Fit India Sundays on Cycle initiative promotes cycling and walking in urban spaces.

Eat Right India Movement (FSSAI)

1. Encompasses several key initiatives aimed at ensuring safe, healthy, and sustainable food for all.
2. Promotes balanced nutrition and healthy eating patterns.

Regulating High Fat, Salt, and Sugar (HFSS) Foods

1. FSSAI, in collaboration with the ICMR–National Institute of Nutrition (NIN), has recommended mandatory labelling of HFSS foods.
2. Front-of-pack labelling enables consumers to make informed dietary choices.

5.Challenges in Managing Rising Obesity and Diabetes

Sedentary Lifestyles

1. Increasing screen time, desk jobs, and reduced physical activity contribute significantly to obesity.
2. Urban infrastructure often discourages walking and cycling.

Unhealthy Dietary Habits

1. Rising consumption of ultra-processed foods high in sugar, salt, and fat drives obesity and diabetes.
2. Modern food industry aggressively markets calorie-dense, nutrient-poor products.

Late Diagnosis

1. A large number of diabetes cases remain undiagnosed until complications emerge.
2. Asymptomatic early-stage diabetes often goes undetected delaying treatment.

Urban–Rural Health Gap

1. Urban areas show higher NCD prevalence but rural healthcare systems are often less equipped to manage NCDs.
2. Rural areas lack specialists and diagnostic facilities for NCD management.

Economic Burden

1. Long-term treatment of obesity-related diseases increases healthcare costs for families and the government.
2. Direct medical costs and indirect productivity losses create economic burden.

6.Way Forward

Promote Preventive Healthcare

1. Awareness campaigns on healthy diets, exercise, and regular health check-ups should reach all populations.
2. Preventive focus reduces disease incidence and complications.

Strengthen Screening and Early Diagnosis

1. Expand screening under primary healthcare and Ayushman Bharat initiatives identifying cases early.
2. Mobile health camps and community screening programs increase access.

Encourage Healthier Food Choices

1. Better food labelling and regulation of HFSS foods guide consumer choices.
2. Subsidies for healthy foods and taxation of unhealthy products shift consumption patterns.

Develop Active Urban Infrastructure

1. Walking tracks, cycling lanes, and public recreational spaces encourage physical activity.
2. Urban planning prioritizing pedestrian and cyclist safety promotes active transportation.

Adopt Whole-of-Government Approach

1. Integrating health, education, urban planning, food regulation, and nutrition policies addresses NCDs comprehensively.
2. Cross-sectoral coordination maximizes impact.

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