



## OBESITY - GS III MAINS

**Q.** Surge in obesity has been the burden among youngsters in India at present. Examine the steps taken by the government to address the rising health disorder in India. (15 marks, 250 words)

**News:** *Obesity rates going up across the world: Lancet study*

### What's in the news?

- A recent publication in The Lancet has highlighted the concerning surge in obesity rates among children, adolescents and adults globally over the last few decades.

### Key Highlights of the Study:

#### India's Statistics on Obesity and Undernutrition:

- **Obesity in Children:** The Lancet reported a significant rise, with 12.5 million Indian children aged 5-19 classified as grossly overweight in 2022, compared to 0.4 million in 1990.
- **Global Ranking:** In 2022, India ranked 174th globally in the prevalence of obesity among girls and boys.
- **Adult Obesity:** Women's obesity increased from 1.2% (1990) to 9.8% (2022), and men's from 0.5% to 5.4% in the same period.
- **Undernutrition:** India faces a "double burden" of malnutrition, with 13.7% of women and 12.5% of men underweight.

#### Global Overview of Obesity and Underweight:

- **One Billion Affected:** Worldwide, over one billion individuals suffer from obesity, including 159 million children and adolescents and 879 million adults in 2022.
- **Combined Prevalence:** The burden of underweight and obesity has increased globally, with prevalence highest in island nations, the Caribbean, Polynesia, Micronesia, and the Middle East and North Africa.

### Obesity:

- According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), obesity is defined as an **abnormal or excessive accumulation of fat** that poses health risks.



## Measurement:

### 1. Adults Over the Age of 20 Years:

- **Obese** - Body Mass Index (BMI) of 30 kg/m<sup>2</sup> or more.
- **Underweight** - Body Mass Index (BMI) is less than 18 kg/m<sup>2</sup>.

### 2. School-aged Children and Adolescents between 5 and 19 Years:

- **Obese** - BMI is two standard deviations more than the mean.
- **Underweight** - BMI is two standard deviations below the mean.

## Factors Leading to Increased Obesity in India:

### 1. Unhealthy Lifestyle:

- Lack of a healthy lifestyle is a major reason for increasing obesity rates in India.
- For example, lack of physical activities such as walks or gyms, lack of proper sleep.

### 2. Lack of Proper Diet:

- Cheaper and easily available junk food has replaced nutritious food in the dietary intakes of the Indian population.
- For example, according to recent Household Consumption Survey, Indians are spending less on cereals and pulses and more on beverages, refreshments and processed food.

### 3. Increased Income and Urbanization:

- Increased income levels have led to a rise in the consumption of foods high in fats, sugar and low physical activity.

### 4. Lack of Awareness:

- There has been a general lack of awareness about healthy eating habits and the guidelines issued by FSSAI.
- Since Health is a state subject, there have been implementation challenges in ensuring proper implementation of FSSAI guidelines.

### 5. Growth of Ultra-processed Food Industry:

- Ultra processed food industry has boomed in India, leading to increased intake of trans fat in India.
- According to a joint study conducted by WHO and ICRIER, India's ultra-processed food industry has grown at a CAGR of 13.37% in terms of retail sales value between 2011 and 2021.

### 6. Obesity No Longer Dependent on Economic Capacity:

- Obesity is no longer the disease of the rich in India.
- Eating junk food is cheaper and easier.
- For example, the cost of samosas and pakoras available at roadside shacks is less than fruit and vegetables.

### 7. Gender Disparities:

- Women are more susceptible to weight gain due to time constraints, focusing on family nutrition over their own, and inadequate sleep.

### 8. Junk Food Accessibility:

- Cheap and easily available unhealthy food options contribute to rising obesity rates, even among lower-income individuals in regions like Tamil Nadu, Punjab, and Goa.



## Issues and Impacts of Obesity in India:

### 1. Individual Health Implications:

- Overweight adults and children are at greater risk for non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular heart disease.

### 2. Improper Development of Children in Formative Years:

- Obesity in children results in stunted physical and cognitive development.

### 3. Psycho-social Impact:

- Obese Individuals face psychosocial challenges like, body image issues and mental health concerns due to societal stigmas associated with weight.

### 4. Economic Burden:

- Obesity increases the economic burden due to productivity losses on account of decreased work efficiency and absenteeism.

### 5. Public Health Challenges:

- Obesity is a major reason behind the growth of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), like diabetes, cancer, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases etc. This has increased strain on the fragile public healthcare system in India.

### 6. Social Inequality and Disparities:

- Obesity perpetuates a cycle of health challenges and economic disadvantages among the vulnerable sections, exacerbates existing socio-economic disparities.
- Women are disproportionately affected by obesity, facing challenges related to reproductive health, maternal health, and overall well-being.

## India's Nutrition Initiatives:

### 1. Eat Right Mela:

- Nationwide initiative promoting healthy eating habits and nutrition awareness.

### 2. Fit India Movement:

- Government campaign promoting physical fitness and overall wellness.

### 3. Eat Right Station Certification:

- Recognition for railway stations promoting healthy food choices.

### 4. Mission Poshan 2.0:

- National mission addressing malnutrition and promoting optimal nutrition.

### 5. Mid-Day Meal Scheme:

- School-based program providing nutritious meals to children.

### 6. Poshan Vatikas:

- Gardens promoting the cultivation of nutrient-rich foods.

### 7. Anganwadi:

- Centers offering healthcare and nutrition services for mothers and children.

### 8. Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme:

- Comprehensive program addressing the health and nutrition needs of children.

### 9. Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY):

- Maternity benefit scheme ensures proper nutrition during pregnancy.



## WAY FORWARD:

### 1. Awareness about the Grave Dangers of Obesity:

- The medical community must create awareness about the NPCDCS guidelines, which recommend annual screening for excess weight in children as young as two to six years old.

### 2. Improving the Access to Nutrient Rich Food:

- The access of vulnerable sections to healthy nutrition must be enhanced by measures such as targeted cash transfers, vouchers for healthy foods, free healthy school meals, and primary care-based nutritional interventions.

### 3. Initiatives to Reduce Obesity among Adults:

- Yoga days can be fixed in a week in offices, welfare societies.
- Under Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, cleaning of parks and other spaces can be promoted, so that adults can come for exercise.

### 4. Initiatives to Reduce Obesity among Children:

- Strict implementation of RTE act norms, by implementing mandatory minimum grounds size and other sports infrastructure in schools.
- Construction of parks and open spaces in colonies, so that children can play outside rather than remaining busy with indoor activities like video games, computer games.

### 5. Disincentivizing the Ultra-processed Food Industry:

- Higher taxes on unhealthy processed and junk food, and front-of-pack nutrition labelling to guide consumers must be implemented.

