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GENERAL STUDIES 2: SOCIAL JUSTICE

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TOPIC: HEALTH

Prescribe preventive medicine for a healthy India

India's Economic Ambitions vs. the Challenge of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs)

1. Context: Economic Growth and Health Risks

- India is on a fast economic growth path with the ambition of becoming a *\$5 trillion economy*.
- However, this vision is threatened by the increasing burden of *non-communicable diseases (NCDs)* such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and cancer.
- These chronic illnesses are now *India's leading cause of death*, accounting for *almost two-thirds of all deaths* in the country.
- Recognizing the seriousness, *preventive healthcare* has now become a national priority.

2. The Rising Economic Burden of NCDs

- While India has made progress in controlling infectious diseases, the rise of lifestyle diseases is now posing a major public health and economic challenge.
- NCDs disproportionately affect the *working-age population*, reducing productivity and leading to premature deaths.
- *Key statistics:*
 - About 22% of *Indians above the age of 30* are at risk of dying from an NCD before reaching 70.
 - Estimates show NCDs could lead to a *5%–10% loss in GDP* due to reduced workforce participation and increased health costs.
 - A study estimates NCDs could cost *\$3.5 to \$4 trillion* to India between 2012 and 2030.

3. Causes and Risk Factors Behind NCDs

- Most NCDs are linked to *modifiable lifestyle-related factors*:
 - Unhealthy diets (high sugar, salt, and fat intake)
 - Physical inactivity and sedentary lifestyles
 - Tobacco and alcohol use



- High levels of *air pollution*, which worsen conditions like asthma, COPD, and heart disease
- *About 80% of premature heart disease, stroke, and diabetes cases* can be prevented through simple lifestyle modifications.

4. Lifestyle Trends and Health Risks in India

- Rising rates of obesity and inactivity are major concerns:
 - Around 22%–23% of *adults* in India are overweight or obese.
- Lack of physical activity and poor dietary habits are contributing to early onset of diseases in younger populations.
- There is a need to treat *air pollution as a public health emergency*, given its strong link to cardiovascular and respiratory diseases.

5. Importance of Early Screening and Regular Check-ups

- Early detection of NCDs is key to reducing mortality and treatment costs.
- Health screenings should begin *from age 40*, or even earlier for high-risk individuals.
- Timely diagnosis helps in better disease management and longer life expectancy.

6. Leveraging Technology and AI for Preventive Care

- India has over *750 million smartphone users*, presenting an opportunity to use digital health tools for disease prevention.
- *Wearable devices* (like fitness bands, smartwatches) help individuals monitor key health metrics (heart rate, activity levels, sleep patterns).
- *Artificial Intelligence (AI)* is revolutionizing healthcare by:
 - Predicting risks of diseases like heart conditions, diabetes, and cancers
 - Detecting early signs of illness from large volumes of health data
 - Supporting doctors in diagnosis and treatment plans

7. Building a Preventive Health Culture in Society

- Preventive care should not be limited to hospitals but become part of everyday life.
- *Individuals* must take responsibility through:
 - Regular health checkups



- Physical activity and balanced diets
- Avoidance of harmful substances like tobacco and alcohol
- *Workplaces* can encourage wellness through health programs, yoga, fitness incentives, and healthy food options.

8. Role of the Health System and Government Initiatives

- India's healthcare system must *shift its focus from treatment to prevention*.
- Key government programs:
 - *Health and Wellness Centres* under Ayushman Bharat provide basic diagnostics and screenings for NCDs.
 - *National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke (NPCDCS)* promotes early detection and lifestyle counseling.
- Policy support is also needed in:
 - Urban planning to encourage walking, cycling, and green spaces
 - Nutrition education in schools and communities
 - Regulation of processed food industries to reduce harmful ingredients

9. Conclusion: A National Imperative

- Addressing NCDs is not just a health issue but a *critical economic and development concern*.
- India must adopt a *preventive healthcare mindset* using a multi-pronged strategy:
 - Promote healthy living habits
 - Use technology for early detection
 - Strengthen public health infrastructure
- Combating NCDs effectively will ensure a *healthy population*, which is essential for long-term *economic growth and national prosperity*.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/prescribe-preventive-medicine-for-a-healthy-india/article69420351.ece>



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**P.L. RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY | 1447/C, 3rd floor, 15th Main Road,
Anna Nagar West, Chennai-40. Ph.No.044-42323192, 9445032221
Email: plrajmemorial@gmail.com Website: www.plrajiacademy.com
Telegram link: <https://t.me/plraji2006> YouTube: P L RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY**