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Malnutrition is a term implying a disturbance in bodily functions arising from an imbalance in the intake of the 40 or so nutrients and minerals that are required for the human body. Obesity, meanwhile, is a bodily function marked by excessive generalized deposition or storage of fat in the adipose tissue. In other words, obesity is simply another form of malnutrition. And with over 65% of India's 2 billion strong populations living below the poverty line and having to scrounge for food bits, I feel that the idea of thinking that obesity is India's crucial dilemma is absurd.

India may certainly have the world's highest paid actors or some of the richest business of the world, but the economic gap between them and the status of most of India couldn't be larger. It is a sorry state to see street urchins scavenging dustbins just so that they don't starve to death. In such conditions, who can even think about getting proper nutrients?

Many people find it convenient to simply gobble up a McDonalds meal in 15 minutes than tediously prepare one of their own. Most families who can afford junk like McDonalds and Dominoes' pizzas can also afford a good nutrition, so here the problem is not money.

Here, too, malnutrition is caused, as no vitamins or minerals are being taken. The quantity in which the food is being produced in India is unbalanced and is not enough to provide proper nutrition to all its citizens, especially those who literally beg for money, causing malnutrition. Obesity is an unrecognized form of malnutrition. The latter is what is India's health care dilemma.

Irresponsibility or/and lack of knowledge regarding vital nutrients of food is mainly to blame. People nowadays have simply no concern regarding health habits. It is poor eating habits of people that mainly cause malnutrition. This might be by over indulgence of one nutrient and negligence of another, or maybe even from day to day customs. For example, places where paddy is grown, rice is the staple diet. As it is people don't get enough nutrients, but they also eat simply polished rice, devoid of the nutritional husk!

Although the main causes are with our habits, there can also be other factors. Famines, droughts, or even wars are among certain circumstances that restrict the import and availability of food. Who would have imagined that in a sunny country like India, all its sunlight is not enough to cover up a shocking deficiency of vitamin D, where normal serum levels of 20 are dropping to below 5! Even the locality and traditions of various people matter. A muslim lady strictly in burqa is bound to have vitamin D deficiency. Residents of sparsely fertile Rajasthan will no doubt lack proper carbohydrates and vitamins, since jowar and bajra are some of the only things grown there.

In a developing, once third world country like ours, the degree to which long term effects of malnutrition may relate to socio economic development of a nation is becoming of increasing concern. Low productivity, poor quality of life, increased expenditures for medical and health care among others are costs that accrue to India, whose immediate concern is not exactly the improvement of nutritional status of the poor.

Malnutrition has some ugly effects on all children. Malnourished children are pale from anemia, dull, and are very small and thin. Lack of proteins causes kwashiorkor. These children are more susceptible to contagious diseases such as measles, diarrhea, bronchitis, etc. properly nourished children are less likely to catch these diseases. Malnutrition adversely affects adults as well. The capacity of malnourished adults for work diminishes considerably and their potential as family bearers and bread winners affect. They lose over 60% of the body weight and can get anemia, apathy, low blood pressure and irritability. Pregnant and lactating women if not properly nourished will not bear fit, healthy children. In fact, the infants might even suffer from physical and mental retardation.

In the light of such health hazards, action has to be taken, and fast. For economic and humanitarian reasons, nutrition should have a higher priority in national development plans. Intervention programs can be planned in terms of cost – effectiveness. This is an important consideration as there is often competition for limited resources available for developing country's development. We, too, can do our bit to spread awareness about human dietary requirements. Under privileged families can be taught the nutritive values of various foods. Let us be the generation that not only awakens but stays awake too.