

Malnutrition, Anaemia Widespread among Children and Adults

Malnutrition and Anaemia Rates Are High among Children

- Malnutrition and anaemia in young children are substantial problems in India. Malnutrition in young children puts them at a higher risk of experiencing health problems such as stunted growth, mental retardation, and increased susceptibility to infectious diseases.
- Almost half of children under five years of age (48 percent) are stunted, that is too short for their age, an indicator of chronic malnutrition, and 43 percent are underweight. The proportion of children who are *severely* undernourished is also notable—24 percent are severely stunted and 16 percent are severely underweight.
- Wasting, defined as an abnormally low weight for the child's height, is also a serious problem in India, affecting 20 percent of children under five years of age. Very few children under five years of age are overweight.
- Since NFHS-2, there has been only a slight improvement in the percentage of young children who are stunted and underweight, and the percentage who are wasted has actually increased slightly.
- Overall, girls and boys are about equally likely to be undernourished. Undernutrition is substantially higher in rural areas. Even in urban areas, however, 40 percent of children are stunted and 33 percent are underweight.
- Most children age 6-59 months in India—70 percent—have anaemia. The condition is so common, in fact, that in all but 4 states (Goa, Manipur, Mizoram, and Kerala) more than half of children are anaemic. In India, anaemia is primarily due to poor nutrition.

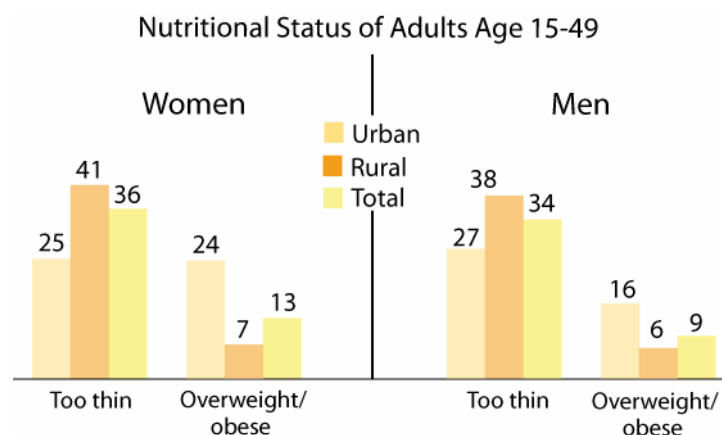
Improvements Are Needed in Infant and Child Feeding and Micronutrient Intake

- While breastfeeding is nearly universal in India, less than half of children (46 percent) are fed only breast milk for the first 6 months, as recommended. At age 6-8 months, only about half of babies are given the recommended complementary foods along with breast milk.
- Only 44 percent of breastfeeding children 6-23 months are fed at least the minimum recommended number of times per day and only 36 percent are given food from at least 3 food groups, as recommended to ensure adequate diversity in their diet. Overall, only 21 percent of breastfeeding and nonbreastfeeding children are fed according to all the recommended infant and young child feeding practices—including receiving breast milk (or other milk or milk products) and eating a minimum number of times per day from a minimum number of food groups that are appropriate for their age.

- Just one-quarter of children age 12-35 months received vitamin A supplements in the six months before the survey. The Government of India recommends twice yearly vitamin A supplements for children age 9-36 months.

Almost Half of Indian Women and 44 Percent of Men Are Either Too Thin or Too Fat—A Dual Burden of Malnutrition That Needs to Be Addressed

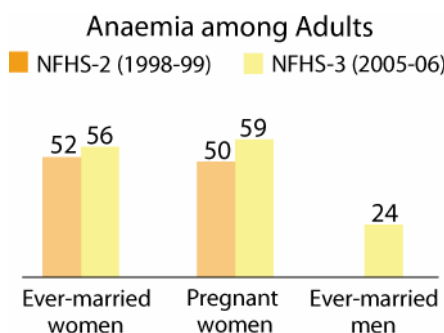
- Malnutrition and anaemia are common among Indian adults. Both malnutrition and anaemia have increased among women since NFHS-2 in 1998-99. Anaemia can lead to reduced productivity, greater susceptibility to infections, and slow recovery from illnesses. Among women, poor nutrition can increase the risk of poor pregnancy outcomes including obstructed labour, low birth weight babies, and postpartum haemorrhage.
- More than one-third of married women and men are too thin, according to the body mass index (BMI), an indicator derived from height and weight measurements. Underweight is most common among the poor, the rural population, adults who have no education and scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.



- Overweight and obesity, the other side of malnutrition, is a growing problem in India, affecting 13 percent of women and 9 percent of men. Overweight and obesity are most common in urban areas, in wealthier households, and among older adults, Sikhs, and those with more education. Delhi, Kerala, and Punjab have the largest percentage of overweight women and men.

Anaemia Is Widespread in Every State

- Over half of women and 24 percent of men suffer from anaemia, and have lower than normal levels of blood haemoglobin. Anaemia has increased in ever-married women from 52 percent in NFHS-2 to 56 percent in NFHS-3. Among pregnant women, anaemia has increased from 50% to 59%.



- While anaemia is common throughout India, the prevalence is highest in all states in the East Region, especially Jharkhand and Bihar where more than two-thirds of women and one-third of men are anaemic. Severe anaemia is most prevalent in Assam for both women and men.

Many Households Are Vulnerable to Iodine Deficiency

- Iodine deficiency, which can lead to mental retardation, goitre, and complications of pregnancy, is easily prevented by using salt fortified with iodine. Only 51 percent of Indian households use adequately iodized salt, however. Though nationwide this rate is virtually the same as in NFHS-2, the use has increased markedly in several states—Kerala, Goa, Jammu and Kashmir, Tamil Nadu, Meghalaya, and Nagaland—and declined in a few others—Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Assam.

For more information about nutrition and anaemia, please see Chapter 10 in the NFHS-3 final report. For more information about child health, see Chapter 9.