

## Challenges in making India healthier

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### Abstract

In real terms, health and fitness are two sides of the same coin means both are very necessary to live a healthy and happy life. Without proper health and fitness, one cannot have a feeling of physical, mental and social well being. It is the common understanding which everyone must follow throughout life for the wellness of their life and keep body and mind functioning in balance. The real meaning of health and fitness involves the efficient and proper working of all the body systems such as heart, nervous system, kidney, liver, digestive system, brain, etc. A person with healthy functioning body organs is called a healthy and fit person. Being healthy and fit is not so easy in such a crowded and polluted environment. It is a big challenge for the whole human fraternity to maintain fitness together with technological improvement in the modern world. Whenever the topic of health and fitness is discussed, many more questions arising in our mind that how to be healthy and fit, what habits we should follow to be healthy and fit, etc. The human body has lots of independently working organs however interdependent as well. If any of the organs suffer a problem, it affects other organs too and arises complications. The functioning of any singular body coordinates the functions of all together. The human body has many important organs however internal which we cannot see from outside. So, it arises a big question that how we can keep our internal organs safe and proper working in order to maintain our health and fitness. Following proper and timely daily routine with necessary physical exercises and healthy food on a daily basis is the way to maintain health and fitness. Healthy food provides our body with all the required and essential nutrients, vitamins, proteins, minerals, healthy fat, and carbohydrate. Regular exercises tones up our body muscles keep skin fresh, keeps the spine straight and fit, regularize digestive system functioning, improves blood circulation to the whole body, keep body and mind in balance, etc. Exercise promotes heart functioning and gives it the strength to pump more blood at a faster rate all through the body. Thus, we can say that exercise and proper nutrition regularly help a person to keep all his organs in absolute fitness. Exercise and healthy foods are the way to keep body and mind healthy as well as avoid health hazards and medication. Both are necessary for people of all ages. Here are some ways which can help us to stay fit and healthy for a long time: In health sector, India has made enormous strides over the past decades. The life expectancy has crossed 67 years, infant and under-five mortality rates are declining as is the rate of disease incidence. Many diseases, such as polio, guinea worm disease, yaws, and tetanus, have been eradicated.

**Reasons** A key reason behind the poor health of the average Indian is the low level of public investments in preventive health facilities such as sanitation and waste management, as well as in medical care facilities such as primary health centres and health professionals. Forms of malnutrition. ...

- Child malnutrition. ...
- Malnutrition in adults. ...

- High infant mortality rate. ...
- Sanitation. ...
- Rapid urbanization and disparities in urban India. ...
- Child health and survival disparities in urban India. ...
- Maternal healthcare disparities in urban India

There are three critical issues that need to be addressed immediately.

1. **Lack of resources.** Over 60 billion rupees, around \$948 million, has been cut from the national health budget. Despite a rapidly growing economy, expenditure on public healthcare has continually contracted. India spends about 1% of its GDP on public health, compared to 3% in China and 8.3% in the United States. The 2013 study from the Lancet Commission on Investing in Health found that India would have to spend \$23.6 billion annually over the next 20 years to achieve a convergence with global levels of infectious disease, child and maternal mortality rates. The government can raise these resources in any number of ways, from reallocation of subsidies to optimization of welfare budgets or by working with state governments. But a failure to raise the required funding could have detrimental effects for an entire generation of Indians.
2. **Out of pocket expenditure.** According to the Ministry of Health in India, each year a whopping 63 million people face poverty due to “catastrophic” healthcare expenditure, which neutralizes any gains made due to rising income and various government schemes aimed at reducing poverty. And according to the World Bank and National Commission’s report on macroeconomics, only 5% of Indians are covered by health insurance. Unless mechanisms and systems are swiftly put in place to ensure that out-of-pocket expenditure is brought down, healthcare expenditure will undo all the economic progress made by millions of Indians.
3. **Bridging the skills gap.** There is a severe need for skilled medical graduates, especially in rural India, which fails to attract new graduates for a variety of reasons. Investments in training and educating a skilled workforce, competitive pay and attractive living conditions (especially in rural India) will ensure that public health facilities are staffed by qualified people.

**Some key challenges are:**

- **Poverty** ‘Fit India Movement’ may not reach the people of below poverty line. To maintain a healthy lifestyle, both physical activity and nutritious food are necessary. But in India, still many people are malnourished and some people do not have access to safe drinking water. So, without solving the issue of poverty and lack of access to affordable nutritious food, a section of people in India will not be able to take advantage of this movement.
- **Lack of play grounds** The motivation to maintain fitness should start from childhood. But in India, many schools lack playgrounds. Lack of playgrounds may push children to turn into an inactive life style.
- **lack of safe public spaces** There is apprehensions that pollution, infrastructure, lack of safe public spaces such as parks, walking routes and cycling tracks will act as a hindrance for India in achieving “Fit India” tag.
- **Population:** India has the world's second-largest population, rising from 760 million in 1985 to an estimated 1.3 billion in 2015.

- **Infrastructure:** The existing healthcare infrastructure is just not enough to meet the needs of the population. The central and state governments do offer universal healthcare services and free treatment and essential drugs at government hospitals. However, the hospitals are, as we said, understaffed and under-financed, forcing patients to visit private medical practitioners and hospitals.
- **Insurance:** India has one of the lowest per capita healthcare expenditures in the world. Government contribution to insurance stands at roughly 32 percent, as opposed to 83.5 percent in the UK. The high out-of-pocket expenses in India stem from the fact that 76 percent of Indians do not have health insurance.
- **Neglect of Rural Population:**
- A serious drawback of India's health service is the neglect of rural masses. It is largely a service based on urban hospitals. Although, there are large no. of PHC's and rural hospitals yet the urban bias is visible. According to health information 31.5% of hospitals and 16% hospital beds are situated in rural areas where 75% of total population resides.
- Moreover the doctors are unwilling to serve in rural areas. Instead of evolving a health system dependent on paramedical (like bare-footed doctors in China) to strengthen the periphery. India has evolved one dependent on doctors giving it a top-heavy character
- **Emphasis on Culture Method:**
- The health system of India depends almost on imported western models. It has no roots in the culture and tradition of the people. It is mostly service based on urban hospitals. This has been at the cost of providing comprehensive primary health care to all. Otherwise speaking, it has completely neglected preventive, pro-motive, rehabilitative and public health measures.
- **Inadequate Outlay for Health:**
- According to the National Health Policy 2002, the Govt. contribution to health sector constitutes only 0.9 percent of the GDP. This is quite insufficient. In India, public expenditure on health is 17.3% of the total health expenditure while in China, the same is 24.9% and in Sri Lanka and USA, the same is 45.4 and 44.1 respectively. **This is the main cause of low health standards in the country.**
- **Social Inequality:**
- **The growth of health facilities** has been highly imbalanced in India. Rural, hilly and remote areas of the country are under served while in urban areas and cities, health facility is well developed. The SC/ST and the poor people are far away from modern health service.
- **Shortage of Medical Personnel:**
- **In India shortage of medical personnel** like doctors, a nurse etc. is a basic problem in the health sector. In 1999-2000, while there were only 5.5 doctors per 10,000 population in India, the same is 25 in the USA and 20 in China. Similarly the number of hospitals and dispensaries is insufficient in comparison to our vast population.
- **Medical Research:**
- Medical research in the country needs to be focused on drugs and vaccines for tropical diseases which are normally neglected by international pharmaceutical companies on account of their limited profitability potential. The National

Health Policy 2002 suggests to allocate more funds to boost medical research in this direction.

- **Expensive Health Services**

In India, it is still widely believed that sports is an 'extra-curricular' activity – an activity that is extra and not essential. Bringing a change in this deep-rooted mind set is the challenge for the government

India needs a concerted and robust multi-stakeholder approach to tackle the NCDs burden and create a healthy nation. To date, single stakeholder actions have not delivered the required outcomes; truly multi-stakeholder efforts will make a greater impact.

**A virtuous cycle with actionable steps from the following multiple stakeholders is urgently needed:**

1. Government needs to create disincentives on unhealthy products and create awareness of costs and the impact of non-compliant behaviour
2. Politicians should exhibit the courage to systemically transform businesses that lead to ill health.
3. Education systems should integrate health as an integral part of the curriculum.
4. Workplace organizations should highlight workplace wellness initiatives and provide a supportive environment for creating a wellness culture.
5. Healthcare organizations need to focus on preventive care and explore new delivery models.
6. Medical equipment manufacturers need to reduce costs by emphasizing value-consciousness and focusing on mass diagnosis and treatment.
7. Information technology should be selected when it is appropriate, not only because it is new. All involved need to harness the potential of digital channels to increase reach and improve health monitoring.
8. Innovation for mass use should be balanced with expensive high-end innovation.
9. Food and beverage producers need to recognize their role in creating a healthy nation.
10. NGOs should help to bridge the gap between government and industry and build multi-stakeholder consensus.

**Three core strategies are proposed to help move the country towards UHC**

1. Strengthen health systems through coordinated investments in all the health system building blocks outlined below: There is a need for healthcare delivery and health service level improvements including comprehensive primary health care, secondary and tertiary care, preventive care and rehabilitation that address curative and preventive aspects of health. In addition, strong health systems require long-term investments in governance and financing health in the country as well as building a responsive and motivated health workforce, improving access to medicines, vaccines and technologies, as well as laying the foundations for a peoplecentred health service that is responsive and accountable to populations and communities.

2. Design and implement policies and programmes to specifically address social determinants of health: While there are many genetic and bio-medical causes of disease and ill-health, the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health (2006) has compiled a wide body of scientific evidence to show that health and

healthcare are strongly determined by various social determinants of health including socio-economic status, caste, gender, disability and various other drivers of social disadvantage. While there is an overall architecture of affirmative action across sectors, it is imperative to design specific policies and programmes that address barriers and drivers of social disadvantage.

**3. Effective legal and governance measures that modify/mitigate/protect against population level health risks and behaviours:** While individual behaviour change and health promotion is taken up by comprehensive primary health care system, there are large-scale and powerful population level drivers of disease, ill-health and risks including (but not limited to) tobacco, food industry, alcohol and road safety. The 'Health in all policies' approach that is widely embraced the world over is useful to guide effective legal and governance measures across sectors that have important gains in health.

**4 Towards comprehensive primary health care through PHC** A vision for accessible and people-oriented health system can be realised only through a well-financed and well-performing network of primary health centres (PHCs). Such a network of PHCs is already available in most (but not yet all) parts of the country. There is a need for a systematic and coordinated investment Summary of core strategies for moving India towards UHC based on strengthening publicly provided comprehensive primary health care and short-term strategic purchasing of secondary/tertiary care, with concomitant improvements in health systems governance and health financing (Illustration by authors) 36 in ensuring good performance and motivated health workforce in all PHCs. Comprehensive Primary Health Care<sup>7</sup> has an important role in the primary and secondary prevention of several disease conditions, including NCDs. Estimates suggest that almost 52% of all conditions can be managed at the primary care level. **4.1 Health and wellness centres:** The announcement of a long-term investment in health and wellness centres (HWCs) below PHC level in the Ayushman Bharat is a great opportunity to strengthen comprehensive primary health care through improving its community orientation. However, there is a need for urgently improving the capacity and motivation of the health workforce as well as carefully monitoring their performance, coverage and community orientation.

#### **WHO Recommendations**

- Children (5-17 years): Sixty minutes of moderate to vigorous activity daily, including play and sports.
- Adults (18–64 years): Walking, gardening, hiking, swimming, walking, household chores, play, games, sports or planned exercise at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity or at least 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity throughout the week. Muscle-strengthening activities at least twice a week.
- Older adults (>65 years): Walking, cycling, chores, play, games, sports or planned exercise at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity or at least 75 minutes of vigorous intensity aerobic activity throughout the week. Muscle-strengthening activities at least wt o days a week.

Fit India Fit India is an idea whose time has come, but it needs to be properly and scientifically executed, particularly directed towards vulnerable groups in children, women and people belonging to middle and low socio-economic strata," said Anoop Misra, chairman, Fortis-C-DOC, Centre for Diabetes, Metabolic Diseases and Endocrinology. The Union ministry of health and family welfare is running a National

Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular diseases and Stroke.

“Fit India Movement will be a very interesting campaign for everyone—children, the elderly, the young and women, and it will be your own movement. I want to make you aware about fitness and for a fit India, we should unite to set some goals for the country, Public health experts have come out in support of Modi for the campaign. “The Prime Minister rightfully points out that walking was part of our culture, where individuals used to walk 8-9km every day. An appropriate built environment, which was integral to our planning earlier, needs to be brought back. Physical activity is known as the ‘wonder drug’ that prevents more than 30 diseases,” said Shifalika Goenka, professor and head of public health ethics, Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI).

“Through fitness and physical activity, we can decrease the hypertension, diabetes, osteoporosis, cholesterol and cancer levels, to name a few, in the entire population. We can improve cognition in children and elderly, and improve mental health and lower depression and improve productivity. This will also lower our health care costs and improve economic productivity, Apprehensions also remain before India achieves the “Fit India” tag in the form of lacunas in pollution, infrastructure, lack of safe public spaces such as parks, walking routes and cycling tracks.

“WHO statistics say one in four adults globally is not active enough, while more than 80% of the world’s adolescent population is insufficiently active,” said Shankar Narang, chief operating officer, Paras Healthcare Pvt. Ltd. “An hour of sports and physical activity every day must be made mandatory in schools. At the same time, workplaces must also be encouraged to join the movement by dedicating 30 minutes of their daily space to some sort of physical exercise

**Conclusion:** *Fit India movement is a necessary initiative considering the increasing number of people turning to a sedentary lifestyle. And there is a need to take steps to make healthy food affordable and accessible.*

Today lifestyle diseases are on a rise in India affecting even the young. Cases of diabetes and hypertension is on the rise and even common among children in India. But small lifestyle changes can prevent these lifestyle diseases. ‘Fit India Movement’ is an effort to bring these small lifestyle changes.

Fit India is an idea whose time has come, but it needs to be properly and scientifically executed, particularly directed towards vulnerable groups in children, women and people belonging to middle and low socio-economic strata. A healthy individual, a healthy family and a healthy society are the essentials to make New India- a Fit India.

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