



Title : Nutrition and Ageing: Practical Challenges in India

Author(s) : Anupama Datta ^a and Prakash Borgaonkar ^b

Institution : ^a Director, Policy Research and Development, HelpAge India, ^b Territory Head, HelpAge India

Email : anupama@helpageindia.org

India is facing the challenges of population ageing and that too without first benefitting from economic growth as had happened in the 'developed countries'. Longevity is also increasing along with the population ageing. This is a sort of a silent revolution. It is going almost unnoticed in our policies and programmes.

The best way to age is to be healthy, active and independent. To achieve these three goals particularly healthy ageing nutrition and life style is very important. The experts are of the view that people should be encouraged to develop healthy eating habits and life style. The advice is to eat balanced and nutritious food and exercise right from early childhood. It is not possible to start that at the age of 60 and expect great results.

There are big challenges involved in implementing it on the ground. The poor people are at a disadvantage in terms of even getting adequate nutrition what to talk of balanced diet. The challenges multiply with other social disadvantages like gender, caste and or disability. In a country where a large majority of population is either below the poverty line and many just above it getting two square meals is a big challenge. Then there are those who come from chronically poor families and have may be inherited malnutrition. Women, lower caste and other disadvantaged groups suffer even more on this count.

Then there is the other end of the spectrum of the well-to-do segments of society that have the problem of excess. There are many who are eating more than prescribed food, eating unhealthy food and are getting affected by issues like obesity. Sedentary and commodious living results in chronic non-communicable diseases.

Health, activity and independence get affected in both these circumstances. Different methods are required to tackle it effectively. However, awareness is the starting point for both. It is important to spread awareness among the poor to eat right and select from the locally available and affordable food items. The governments is running many nutrition/ supplement programmes for children and pregnant women. But, that does not seem to include all the deserving people from the population. So, efforts should be made in that direction. With age and declining abilities to earn and also at times cook, the poor older persons may suffer from hunger and malnutrition.

The others, who are suffering from the problem of excess, need to be made aware of the importance of balanced and nutritious diets. The experts and may be some food industries could be involved by way of CSR to spread awareness and also help people try out healthier recipes by supplementing the traditional ingredients with more suitable ones. In these families there is also the issues concerning children who are at formative stages in life and need to be guided to adopt healthy habits as they are likely to live even longer than their parents and or grandparents. They should be made to understand the importance of decreasing morbidity in later life.

The National Policy on Older Persons does understand the importance of nutrition along with health and both are given place in the areas of implementation. However, not many active steps have been taken to implement it in the right earnest. It's time to act!