

How can malnutrition
be caused by social,
economic, and
cultural



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Malnutrition is a condition where the diet is not balanced resulting with a deficiency disease. It happens worldwide but can be more common to developing countries, as economic, social, cultural and environmental conditions all have an influence

A balanced diet involves sufficient amount of carbohydrates, lipids, fibre, protein, vitamins, and minerals and water. Lack of these nutrients or overload can increase the risk of having a deficiency disease.

High amounts of lipids (fats) cause obesity, because of the high-energy content. This causes strain on joints; leading to foot-problems, pressure on the spine and more work for the heart. Lipids also increase the risk of Coronary Heart Disease (CHD), by blocking the coronary arteries. Fat and cholesterol accumulates in artery walls causing Arteriosclerosis- where the wall of an artery bulges and blocks blood flow. Cholesterol occurs in saturated lipids (no double-bonds) such as animal fat and butter. Hence the reason to eat less fat and substitute for other means like vegetable oil and unsaturated lipids.

Even though one only needs a small dose of vitamins and minerals, it is an essential dietary requirement otherwise resulting in a deficiency disease.

Lack of Vitamin C causes skin problems like Scurvy. Without it the skin becomes weak and cracks open and wounds do not heal, as is what happened with sailors far away on ships who were encouraged to eat limes.

Rickets is another example of a deficiency disease due to lack of Vitamin D. It causes the bones to stay soft and is popular among childhood where the

child's legs become bowed as the bones do not contain enough calcium salts to strengthen them.

Anaemia is a common disease worldwide due to lack of iron in the body. It is a deficiency of red blood cells and haemoglobin. It makes the person feel tired because their blood can't carry enough oxygen to their cells. Also influenced by deficiencies of cyanocobalamin (Vitamin B12).

Osteoporosis disease is more common in women with calcium and calciferol levels having some effect but not being the main cause but oestrogen levels and lack of physical exercise playing a big part.

Iodine deficiency disorder (IDD) is the swelling of the thyroid gland in the neck known as the Goitre. It is a widespread type of malnutrition with its highest rates in areas where soil used contains little iodine. It can have serious consequences if pregnant women are affected causing their newborn child to have severe brain damage. To reduce risk of IDD, health advisors have introduced adding small amounts of iodine to salt for human consumption hopefully decreasing the disorder figures.

Fibre is very important for the diet. It is material that cannot be digested and mainly consists of cellulose from plants; therefore common sources of fibre are fruit, vegetables and cereals. It improves the health of the gut by spreading up throughout, preventing stagnation and providing exercise for the muscles of the gut wall. Insufficient amount of fibre is more commonly found among developed countries, where many unhealthier foods are available. Many investigations have shown that fibre can prevent

constipation and maybe also reduce the risk of diseases of the large
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intestine including appendicitis, cancer and haemorrhoids but evidence for this is weak.

Many people all around the world are Vegans or Vegetarians, if it be by own chose or cultural, religious views. A vegan diet contains no animal product consumption; therefore not eating meat, fish, milk, butter, chesses, eggs, and any other dairy products. Vegetarian diets vary but they usually include eggs, milk, butter cheese but excluding meat.

There may be strong ethical and moral reasons for not eating meat etc, but their diets can result in many deficiencies.

For vegetarians their main concern is the lack of iron in their body. This also concerning for vegans. Levels of iron in many plant products can be high but it is in chemical form and so less easy to be absorbed compared to iron from animal products. To avoid Anaemia, vegans need to eat plenty of iron-rich plant food, especially ones containing ascorbic acid, as this encourages iron absorption.

Vegans have to take into consideration their calcium levels though a deficiency hasn't been reported but lack of it can make bones weaker.

As plant products do not contain calciferol (vitamin D), and although it can be synthesized in the skin, this only happens if open to ultra-violet light. Which is not so good for the winter days. However during the summer the liver can store enough calciferol to avoid a deficiency later in winter. To maintain calciferol (vitamin D) vegans are encouraged to drink soya milk,

and have margarine and breakfast cereals, which usually have calciferol, added in it.

These foods are also appropriate for cyanocobalamin (vitamin B12) intake. There have been cases of this deficiency especially in babies breast-fed by vegan mothers. They have to be careful to ensure they absorb enough of this vitamin, which can also be taken in the form of tablets.

Most processed foods contain additives that can act as preservatives, antioxidants, colourings, flavourings, stabilizers and acid-regulators. Some of these can have harmful effects.

One example is where nitrate is added to bacon as a preservative but this reacts with amino acids and produces nitrosamines, which increases risk of cancer.

A yellow colouring known as tartrazine added to drinks and foods can cause asthma, skin rashes and hyperactivity.

Another example is monosodium glutamate, which is added to foods as a flavour enhancer. Some people maybe allergic to impurities added to it causing sweating, rapid heartbeat and headaches.

People are encouraged to look carefully at food labels to check for food additives and other foods so they can maintain their nutrient levels; therefore create a balanced diet.

However in specific parts of the world malnutrition cannot be helped. Places in poverty, may have difficulty in buying food, or crops grown by farmers

may be insufficient due to lack of investment. Or even environmental conditions where droughts or floods might destroy crops, resulting in mineral deficiencies in soil. Some countries under corrupt government may be victims of malnutrition where certain food production is stopped or aftermath of war a typical disease is scurvy where fresh fruit and vegetables are not available.

Malnutrition is common all over the world but popular in some places more than others. The worst countries to experience malnutrition would be where there was a low economic rate, bad weather conditions for crops to grow and bad social events effecting the eating habits of the people.