Society & Social Justice · GS - II

Explain the significance of early-life nutrition in shaping long-term health outcomes. How can India address nutritional risks during the first 1,000 days of life?

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
DAILY PRACTICE 27/11/2026	GS - II	Society & Social Justice

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
15	~250 words

Answer Hint

First 1,000 days, developmental programming, epigenetics, maternal nutrition, complementary feeding, non-communicable diseases, public health interventions

Model Answer

The first 1,000 days, extending from conception to a child's second birthday, constitute a critical period for physical growth, brain development and metabolic programming. Nutritional deficiencies and unhealthy dietary exposures during this phase can have lasting consequences.

Long-term significance of early nutrition

1. **Physical and cognitive development:** Adequate maternal and infant nutrition supports brain development, immunity and healthy growth.
2. **Metabolic programming:** Early nutritional conditions can influence metabolic pathways and potentially affect the risk of obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases later in life.
3. **Epigenetic mechanisms:** Nutritional and environmental exposures may influence gene expression, providing one possible pathway through which early conditions affect later health.

4. **Dietary behaviour:** Early feeding practices can shape food preferences and eating habits throughout childhood.

Challenges in India

1. Maternal undernutrition and anaemia can affect foetal development.
2. Poor dietary diversity and inadequate complementary feeding can contribute to childhood malnutrition.
3. Excessive consumption of added sugars and highly processed foods increases long-term dietary risks.
4. Unequal access to maternal healthcare, nutrition education and quality food affects vulnerable households disproportionately.

Public health priorities

Strengthening maternal nutrition services, breastfeeding support, appropriate complementary feeding and nutrition education is essential. Programmes such as POSHAN Abhiyaan and Anganwadi services can support these interventions through community-level delivery and monitoring.

Conclusion

Investing in nutrition during the first 1,000 days is a long-term public health strategy. However, findings linking early sugar exposure with adult cancer risk should be interpreted cautiously until supported by further research.

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