

## Determinants of Health

The health of both the individual and the general population is determined by the social, biological, physical and behavioural factors. Many factors combine together to affect the health of individuals and communities. Whether people are healthy or not, is determined by their circumstances and environment. To a large extent, factors such as where we live, our environment, genetics, our income, education, family and friends with whom we live – all affect our health. The determinants of our health include –

\* **Environment** – Environmental determinant of health is usually any kind of external agent that can be physical, chemical, biological, social or cultural that can cause a change in the health status of an individual or a group of individuals. Factors of our natural environment (eg-air, water quality) and human-built environment (e.g. housing, workplace safety, road designs) play a role in individual and public health. The quality of air, food safety, chemical safety, water, sanitation, occupational hazards, ultra-violent housing, ionizing agents, mobility and transport, they all are included in environment which affect our health.

\* **Pathogenic factors** – These pathogens include bacteria, viruses, fungi or protozoa which caused various infectious diseases. These all can be seen by microscopes.

\* **Food** – Nutrition plays an important role in the promotion and maintenance of health and prevention of diseases in order to keep well our body and mind. Our growth and development needs adequate nutritious food. A person, who does not eat the right foods in adequate quantity or does not have enough to eat, becomes malnourished, good nutrition is essential for the attainment of normal growth and development. Food is important in preventing deficiency diseases and infections. The indirect effect of malnutrition on the community are even more striking a high general death rate, high infant mortality rate, high sickness rate and a lower expectations of life.

\* **Socio-cultural determinants** – Most of the burden of disease affecting people and resulting in health problems is the result of complex interactions between individuals and socio-economic and environmental determinants of their health. Different epidemiological trends in the health like asthma, obesity, injuries, inappropriate nutrition, physical inactivity and mental health problems – these all reflect the impact of extensive socio-cultural shifts experienced over recent decades. Issues around economic disadvantage, cultural diversity and tolerance, the changing nature of work and family structures, family violence and homelessness challenge the health system to meet increasingly complex health needs in collaboration with other sectors. Social and economic disparities are one of the major public health challenges confronting India. A safe environment, adequate income, meaningful social roles, secure housing, higher level of education and social support are all associated with better health and wellbeing. In addition to health behaviours, these educational, social, cultural, economic and environmental factors comprise what we call population health determinants.

\* **Traditions, Habits & customs** – Tradition and customs are two major determinants of our health. They give the feeling of unity and security to the members of a community. They are set rules of our society which have been followed for several generations and have great influence on the behaviour of the community people. Sometimes they are harmless but others are harmful. Useful cures can be encouraged, e.g. using papaya seeds for intestinal worms, use of tulsi leaves in treating cough and cold, but harmful habits and beliefs are to be discouraged by

giving the health education to the people, e.g. washing green leafy vegetable after cutting. Branding newborn babies with hot rods etc.

\* **Social stratification** – Our Society is divided in lower and higher units, which is called social strata or caste or class groups. This social segmentation leads feeling of superiority and subordination and each of these have their own feelings, heredity which prohibits them from doing specific works or following any specific rule. This affects their mental health.

\* **Life-style** – Obesity, alcoholism smoking, drugs are some problems which are the result of our present life-style. Life-style related health determinants are multi-dimensional and related to our health. Being overweight leads to heart disease, hypertension, diabetes and some type of cancers. Use of alcohol, tobacco and drugs presents devastating effects on the health of the family, friends and community. There is no health without mental health. This public health approach to mental health and mental illness is based in a population-based model characterized by concern for the health of a population in its entirety and by an awareness of the linkage between health and the physical and the psychosocial environment.

\* **Hygiene** – Hygiene is the science of health and its preservation. Good personal hygiene usually means those measures a person takes to keep his skin, hairs, nails, toe nails and his health & mouth clean and in good condition. Physical health is an important component of total health. Personal and environmental, maintenance of both hygiene is of paramount importance. The science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life & promoting physical and mental and efficiency. Maintenance of personal hygiene includes maintenance of good physique, muscle strength, clean mouth, teeth free from carries, healthy skin, healthy ears & nose, preserve energy and not get tired in carrying out daily tasks and resistance against infections.