



**Topic:** Seminar on “Childhood Malnutrition: The Double Burden”.

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MARCH NUTRITION MONTH

As part of the 'March Nutrition Month' campaign Pakistan Nutrition and Dietetic Society (PNDS) held a seminar. Presentations were done on the topics related to both: Under nutrition and Over nutrition among Pakistani children.

Pakistan is currently facing a dual burden of malnutrition in children.

- Ayesha Zahid Khan, consultant Nutritionist and Community Nutrition Researcher, General Secretary PNDS presented the etiology and Pakistani perspective of Under-nutrition. She informed the audience that every hour of every day, 300 children die because of malnutrition in Asia. Malnutrition is a public health issue in Pakistan contributing to almost 35% of all under-5 deaths in the country. Pakistan has one of the highest rates of infant mortality in the region. From those who survive 22.3% infants are born Low Birth Weight (LBW). LBW infants are predisposed to developmental delays, chronic diseases in later life and LBW females are at risk of giving birth to LBW babies. Thus emerges a vicious cycle difficult to break. Ms Khan stated that in Pakistan the main reasons for under-nutrition in children is failure of mothers to exclusively breastfeed their infants, improper weaning practices, food taboos, unawareness of the importance of diet. Ms Khan emphasized that it is important to take preventive measures to fight under-nutrition. Nutrition Education is the strongest and the most effective method to prevent and control under-nutrition. She presented the results of her unpublished study that demonstrated improvement in nutritional status and positive changes in dietary habits with a nutrition education intervention.

Nilofer Fatimi Safdar, consultant nutritionist, President PNDS and a doctoral scholar in Public Health and Nutrition at the University of Massachusetts, USA presented an overview on the topic of Overweight & Obesity in Children. Ms Safdar explained that the prevalence

of overweight and obesity is gradually increasing in urban cities of Pakistan and has become a public health challenge for health care providers. Among the many causes of overweight and obesity among children, the rapid growth of fast food industries, increased marketing & advertisements by transnational food companies, excess consumption of junk food and sugar-sweetened beverages by children are some of the main reasons to an increase surge of the problem. The poor facilities for physical activity in schools and communities, unsafe neighborhoods for outdoor recreational activities and increased academic pressure by parents and teachers has further increased sedentary activities among children by increased television viewing, computer use etc.

There are huge psychological consequences of overweight and obesity among children and can result in social isolation, stress, depression, anxiety and interfere with learning in school. Major medical complication associated with overweight and obesity among children are type 2 diabetes, increased blood pressure and cardiovascular diseases which are being already seen in Pakistani children.

Ms Safdar further stressed that there is an immediate need for effective measures to be taken by families and government in order to provide more play grounds, parks and outdoor recreational activities in schools and in neighborhoods. There has to more availability of healthy food choices in school canteens and excessive control over the advertisement of junk food and sugar sweetened beverages on the media.

The event was sponsored by Nutricia: Advanced Medical Nutrition, Pakistan



