



DIETARY AND NON-DIETARY FACTORS AFFECTING HEALTH STATUS OF PRE SCHOOL CHILDREN

Home Science

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ABSTRACT

The study was planned to find out the general health status of preschoolers according to dietary and non-dietary factors. Total 245 children were observed for various parameters. Amongst them 141 were boys and 104 were girls ranging from 2.5 to 4 years. Food pattern and physical activities were mainly observed using a pre formed and pre tested questionnaire. The study showed that overall health status of these preschoolers was satisfactory according to dietary and non-dietary factors. Physical activities and food habits were found healthy. Some factors were found where the results seemed to be towards alarming side, but with necessary precautionary actions and awareness creation among children and parents, they can be worked out to get better outcomes. Based on study and results it is evident that in middle income socio economic group preschoolers are normally having habits and lifestyle, such that the overall health status is maintained properly and is not leading towards severe mal nutrition. Only few inputs and awareness can just add on to betterment of the health among preschoolers of this particular section.

KEYWORDS:

Preschooler, Dietary and non dietary factors, Physical activity level, Meal consumption

INTRODUCTION

Childhood can be said as the golden period of life. In 2009, Kaul and Sankar stated that initial six to eight years of life are known as early childhood stage. Growth is very rapid during these years and a child learns so many social/psychomotor skills which he/she would carry for the life time. That is why proper growth and development is very important for a child in this age.

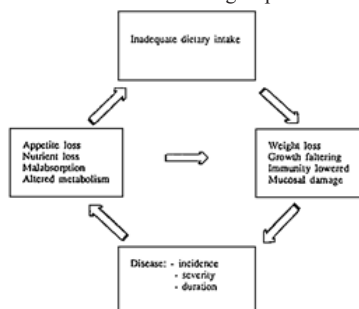
HEALTH – as defined by the WHO is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. According to Ansari and his team (2008), first five years are full of health hazards. They classified children as Infants i.e. birth to 1 year, and Preschoolers i.e. 1-6 years. Pre-school years are characterized by increased physical activity. Physical activity influences energy needs. Due to these physiological conditions, children during this period, in fact, are most susceptible to malnutrition – followed by other infections.

There are several factors which can be considered as the indicators of good health. They include;

- Achievement of optimal growth and development during childhood and adolescence
- Maintaining structural and functional integrity of body tissues throughout life
- Ability to perform mental tasks efficiently and mental well-being
- Ability to withstand the inevitable process of aging
- Ability to combat diseases and resist infections

Many dietary and non-dietary factors affect the child health. If the parents/family members/care-giver follow healthy food habits, a regular life style, regular exercises or other physical activities and a positive approach towards life; the child would definitely observe and would try to adopt the same.

We get different nutrients from whatever we eat. All together these nutrients help our body to stay healthy and active. Children may be very choosy about their food, but for proper growth and development, and to avoid over/under nutrition, it is very important that a child gets wisely chosen amount from all the food groups.



The flow chart here shows the vicious cycle between inadequate dietary intake and disease incidence, severity and duration. This proves the importance of nutritional status of a healthy child.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention stated that regular physical activity helps build and maintain healthy bones and muscles; helps reduce the risk of developing obesity and chronic diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. It also promotes psychological well being.

According to Girish et. al. (2014) in their report in 2014, states that physical activity can be a parameter to find out malnutrition. Swaminathan et al., (2011) stated in his study that if a child is active from his/her early life itself, this habit would be helpful in continuing such activities/sports/exercises in their adulthood also.

Immunization is also very necessary for each child to fight against many dangerous diseases during the childhood and sometimes lifetime. It saves nearly 2-3 million lives from life threatening diseases like measles, diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough. This was reported in Immunization Facts and Figures, 2013.

Routine Immunization- along with being very important, also one of the most cost-effective public health intervention as stated by Dindod et. al. (2014). This was introduced and being practiced in India since 1978. According to all the above factors affect the nutritional status and thus, health status of children. And health status decides physical and mental growth of children. Healthy children would make a healthier country.

This research is mainly oriented for the physical health status of pre-school children of Anand – Gujarat. Along with the meal frequency, physical activities and awareness of advance vaccinations are included in the study.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design: This study was designed to get an idea about the general health status of pre-school children in semi-urban area like Anand city. Analytic observational study is performed to know about different parameters of general health status. Anthropometric parameters, biochemical parameters, dietary habits and physical activity were recorded by using the suitable methods.

Subjects or Participants: 2 to 4 years old children (boys and girls) from D. N. Patel School, Anand - were included as the participants and this age group was chosen by the Purposive sampling method. Total 245 students were there of 2 to 4 years of age. Amongst them 141 boys and 104 girls were there. Their parents also participated by answering the questionnaire.

Instruments: A pre-formed and pre-tested questionnaire was used to collect data. It was prepared according to the purpose of the study. All the questions regarding basic information, and other details like sleep hours, play time, type of sports/activity they like, eating habits, eating out frequency - were included in order to get a clear idea about their routine and habits.

RESULTS

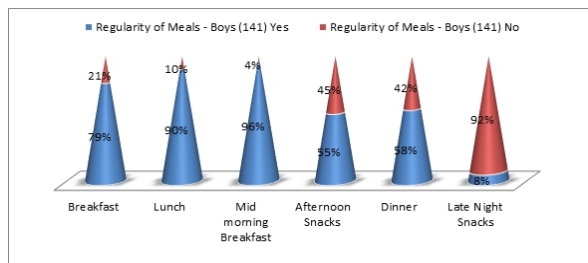


FIGURE 1: Meal regularity of boys

The study showed nice regularity in first three meals but a decline was observed for afternoon snacks and dinner in boys.

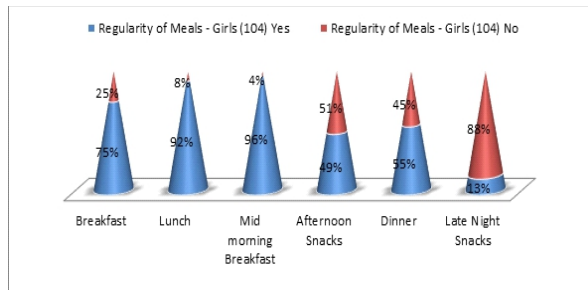


FIGURE 2: Meal regularity of Meal Regularity of Girls

Almost same numbers were obtained for girls, first three meals were consumed regularly and a marked irregularity observed for afternoon snacks and dinner.

However, irregular consumption of late night snacks in boys and girls was considered as healthy habit.

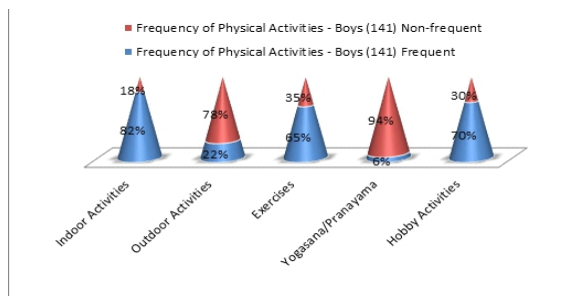


FIGURE 3: Frequency of physical activities in boys

For boys, indoor activities and static exercises were found evident, but practice of outdoor activities and Yogasana/Pranayama were found very non-frequent.

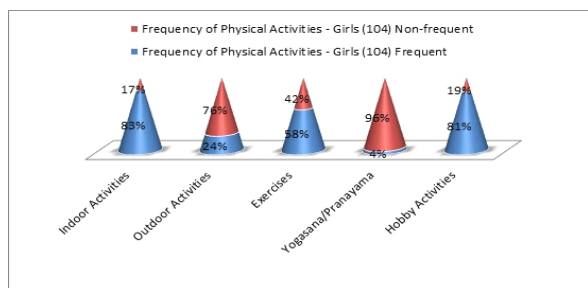


FIGURE 4: Frequency of physical activities in girls

Almost same results for girls were found. Creative part is that, majority of boys and girls give time for their hobby activities.

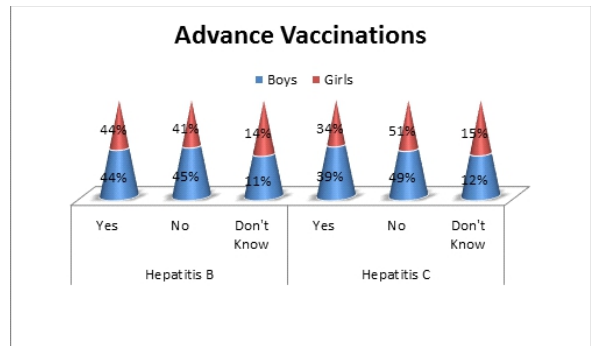


FIGURE 5: Comparison of Advance vaccinations in boys and girls

More than 40% boys and girls were not given advance vaccination of Hepatitis B and C and around 10-15% children/parents were unaware of such vaccinations or whether given or not. CONCLUSION

Dietary habits of preschoolers in semi-urban area were found satisfactory with several improvements. Level of outdoor activities and performance of Yogasana/Pranayama were not up to the mark. Lack of knowledge, attitude and practice of advance vaccination was evidently seen.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Parents as well as schools should take special interest in promoting outdoor activities, sports and other physical exercises/activities by regularly organizing events and competitions. Importance and benefits of Yogasana and Pranayama are accepted worldwide now. They were originated in India. It is a must that basic training of Yogasana and Pranayama be imparted since preschool age to create awareness and to include them in routine practice. Food habits should be taken care of. It is recommended that children have all the meals. Afternoon snacks and dinner should be promoted in an attractive way so that children don't skip them. Parents should be explained the importance of vaccination. Knowledge about all the available vaccinations should be given to the parents during health checkups.

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