Delhi

Child Health—Its Maintenance Growth and Development

By

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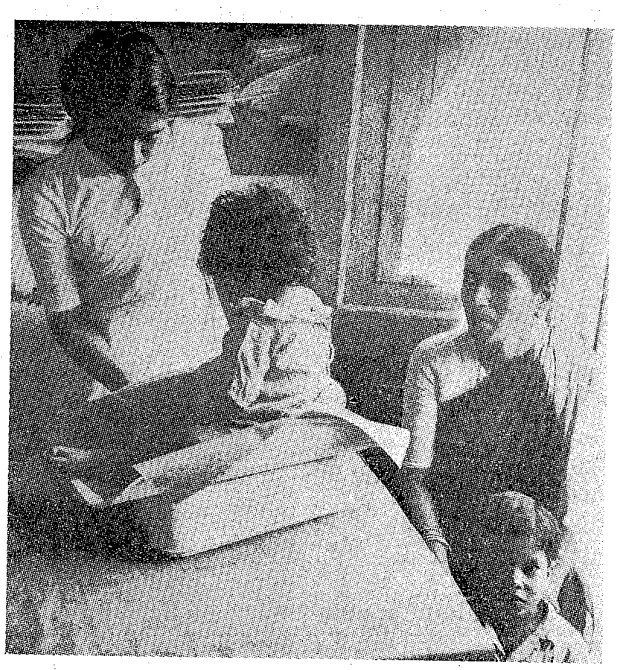
It was a fine morning, I was coming from centre. On the way I was stopped by a groaning voice of a child, "*Ma Roti*". The child was about 3 years old, ricketic and marasmic. Her mother was hardly 20 years old—poverty and starvation had wiped the blush of youth from her face and she looked an old and worn out woman. As a health-worker my thoughts at once turned towards her and I became anxious to analyse what the causes might be.



The toddler being weighed

"The child of today will be the citizen of to-morrow", they say. What will become of this child ? That nation is strong whose citizens are healthy, well built and prosperous. So if the public do not become conscious of their children's needs, the programmes designed to improve the health of the nation are in vain. To arouse public conciousness is vital.

India is a land of rural communities, 80% of our population live in the villages, where some of the basic facilities of health are not yet provided. Inadequate water supply, unsafe disposal of refuse, poor sanitation, lack of adequate diet, lack of health education and medical facilities ; and many superstitions add to the problem. There needs to be provision for—

(*i*) Environmental Sanitation.
(*ii*) Suitable living conditions.
(*iii*) Adequate Nutrition.
(*iv*) Suitable clothing.
(*v*) Fresh air and sunshine.
(*vi*) Rest, exercise and sleep.
(*vii*) Healthy recreation.

In order to facilitate the desirable growth and development of a child to its maximum capacity, care has to be started from the time of its conception in the mother's womb. Preparing the mother for the child to come is a great

responsibility which is shared by the family, the community and the nation.

Environmental sanitation is important in reducing morbidity and mortality. In rural areas there is little provision for safe disposal of refuse and human excreta. So the flies become great friends of the masses of people living in such communities. Water supply is very poor and unsafe, therefore every year communicable diseases break out and increase the mortality. Housing often means miserable huts while many are without any shelter.

How can we expect a better standard of life in villages, when people have not been provided even with the bare necessities of life ?

Adequate nutrition promotes growth and development and assists in meeting the demand for wear and tear of the body. Strictly speaking, the food in villages, though simple, more than often supplies the required food value for a child's growth and development. Unfortunately the villagers fail to make a proper selection of the available food. Mostly the villager's diet is rich in carbohydrate and lacking in good protein. Vegetables, fruits and milk are lacking and they do not realise the value of it. Children upto 3 years or even older are often seen taking their mothers milk. They seldom know that they should be fed on additional food. In addition to this, poor cooking and eating habits, and customs often add to the problem.

The importance of suitable clothing is not realized by many village people. They think clothing is a luxury rather than a necessity. In addition, the social customs and economic conditions discourage proper clothing. In most places it is customary to leave the new born child unclothed until certain ceremonies are performed—7th to 15th day.

Fresh air and sunlight are vital factors in preservation and promotion of life. Fortunately these are in abundance in India specially in villages.

Sleep, rest and exercise are necessary for the healthy development and growth of all individuals.

Play and recreation are food for a healthy mind and body. This is a good channel through which a child's expression finds its way. This gives an opportunity for the child to develop mental and emotional abilities and a sturdy body.

In trying to solve these problems the following suggestions are offered for consideration. In M.C.H. Schemes, emphasis is laid on the growth and development of the child. Adequate antenatal, intranatal and postnatal care is given to ensure a healthy child. Parents can be helped to get interested and conscious of M.C.H. Services and should take advantage of these services in order to fulfil their role as good parents.

1. Improvement of Sanitation

The people should have good housing and environmental conditions, and safe disposal of refuse and human excreta, specially in rural areas.

2. Diet

The need to provide the right kind of food for the child growth and development must be taught. Good food habits should be developed early in life.

The diet should be suited to age groups and, of course, according to their socio-economic standards. If the child is less than 9 months of age, if artificially fed, his milk mixture should receive additional food. As he grows older semi-solids, *e.g.* vegetables, fruit, *suji*, *kichari*, *daliya* are added. Eggs two or three a week, *dhall*, peas or meat soup etc., butter or oil one tea-spoon daily ; and sunshine to achieve a quantity of vitamin 'D'.

3. Clothing

The use of the suitable clothing is three fold—for protection, adornment and maintenance of body heat ; the last is most essential from the health point of view.

4. Sleep, Rest and Exercise

Rest and exercise are essential for health and development. Babies usually get enough rest and sleep.

Babies should be taken out of door

whenever the weather permits. A child has plenty of opportunity for exercise in bed. Restriction by tight clothings or bed clothes should be avoided. Older children should have plenty of active play and wholesome occupation out of doors every day.

5. Training and Management

Descipline and habit formation is an important factor in a child's life and lays the foundation for good citizenship. The child is greatly influenced by his environment. Therefore parents should provide him with a good and happy environment. Children need love and protection and a feeling of security. They should also be given adequate help in preparing for sex-development and its implications ; and guidance in adjusting to school and social life. The parents set the pattern that a child is likely to follow.

6. Precautions against Disease

In the early life, minor ailments and communicable diseases are all too common among children. So precautions should be taken well in time. He should be under the supervision of a doctor who will make a thorough examination at least once a year and a continuous follow-up as required.

He should receive immunization for such communicable diseases as small pox, diphtheria, whooping cough and tuberculosis.

We all know drinking water should be safe. It should be boiled before drinking if there is any doubt about its purity.

The milk should be boiled.

Raw fruits and vegetables should be thoroughly washed and steeped in a safe antiseptic.

Flies, mosquitoes and bed-bugs and other insects should be cleared from homes by keeping the environment clean and by the use of insecticides.

During epidemics the child should be kept away from crowded areas.

Favourable Conditions at School

After the age of five the child enters the school and spends practically the whole of his childhood there. So there are many health hazards to be faced if we do not pay adequate attention to the safety of :

(*i*) The school buildings

(*ii*) The activities at schools

(*iii*) Safety of food supplied at schools

(*iv*) Work load at school for the child to cover.

(*v*) Facilities for the health of the child such as medical care.

In concluding, I would like to say that we, who have a hand in caring for the health and happiness of little children, are given a great responsibility. We should be proud and glad of the privilege to help India's children grow into sturdy adults.

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