

Health determinants

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INTRODUCTION

Health is the level of functional and metabolic efficiency of an organism. In humans it is the ability of individuals to manage and adapt when facing physical, mental or social changes (Huber *et al.*, 2011). The World health Organization defined health as a state of complete Physical, mental and social well being and not merely absence of disease or infirmity (World Health Organization, 2006). This definition has been subject to controversy, in particular, as lacking operational value, the ambiguity in developing cohesive health strategies and because of the problem created by use of the word complete (Callahan, 1973 and Tayso and Marandi, 2008). Other definitions have been proposed and among which a recent definition correlates health and personal satisfaction (Bellieni and Buonocore, 2009).

The four Primary components of health that are important for improved physical health are as follows:

(i) Cardio respiratory Capacity- It is the ability of the body to take oxygen, deliver it to the cells and use it at the cellular level to create energy for physical work.

(ii) Muscular capacity – it refers to the spectrum of muscular capability, *i.e.*, muscular endurance, muscular strength and muscular power.

(iii) Flexibility – it is the range of movement a joint is capable of performing.

(iv) Body Composition – It is the proportion of fat free mass (muscle, bone, blood and body fluids) to fat mass (adipose tissue).

Generally, the context in which an individual lives is of great importance for both his health status and quality of his life. It has been established that health is maintained and improve not only through the advancement and application of health science but also through the efforts and intelligent life style choices of the individual and society. WHO has recognized a number of health determinants (World Health Organisation, 2011 and Public Health Agency of Canada, 2011) which include social and economic environment, the physical environment and the person's individual characteristics and behaviors. The Key health determinants are:

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1. Income and social status.
2. Social support networks.
3. Education
4. Employment and working conditions.
5. Social Environment
6. Physical environment
7. Personal health practices and coping skills.
8. Healthy Child Development
9. Biology and Genetic endowment
10. Health services
11. Gender
12. Culture

Each of the determinant is being briefly elaborated in the following paragraph:

Income and social status :

The Income of an individual plays an important role in determining his social status which in turn improves his health status. High income determines the living conditions of an individual. He is able to live in safe housing conditions and buy sufficient good quality food. The healthiest populations are those in societies which are prosperous and have an equal distribution of wealth. It has been reported that low income people are more likely to have shorter life and suffer from illness than people with higher income regardless of age, sex, race and place of residence.

Social support networks :

Support from families, friends and communities is associated with better health. The caring and respect in social relationship leads to a sense of satisfaction and well being and thus enables to fight against health problems. After an extensive study in California it was reported that the more social contacts people have the lower is the chance of their premature death.

Education :

Education helps to improve health status as it is closely related to socio-economic status. Effective education, therefore, contributes to health and prosperity of people and the country. A study showed that poorly educated Canadians were unemployed so they had no income and suffered from health problems as compared to educated Canadians. Good education can improve many other determinants of health.

Employment and working condition :

Stressful conditions like unemployment and unsafe work environment are often associated with poor health conditions and lead to short life span. While people who have more control over their work circumstances and have fewer stress related demands of the job are healthier and often live longer.

Employment has a significant effect on the physical, mental and social health of an individual. It provides not only money but also a sense of identity and purpose resulting in

personal growth. Thus it is evident that people with good jobs are healthy and have greater life expectancy than unemployed people who suffer from many health problems and have shorter life.

Social environment :

The social support network extends to the broader community, region or country too. It provides social stability, safety, recognition of diversity, good working relationship and cohesive community, thus reducing potential risk to health. People who are excluded from society have worse health chances.

Culture which includes customs, traditions and beliefs can affect health of women and children. In 1996 family members were accused in 24 per cent of all assault against children.

Physical environment :

The physical environment has great effect on health. As a result of pollution air, water, soil and food have become contaminated and this has a variety of ill effects on health, life cancer, birth effects, respiratory and gastro intestinal disorder, skin diseases etc. It has been observed that Asthma (a respiratory disorder highly sensitive to air borne contaminants) in children has markedly increased over the last two decades it has been reported that 13 % boys and 11% girls in the age group 0 – 19 suffered from Asthma in 1996-1997.

Personal health-practices and scoping skills :

Personal health practices and scoping skills include those actions by which individuals can prevent diseases. These include actions like self care, coping with challenges, development of self reliance, ability to solve problems and make choices that enhance health. Personal health practices are greatly influenced by the socio- economic environment in which people live, learn. Work and play. In Canada smoking is estimated to be responsible for at least one fourth of all deaths for adults between the ages 35-84.

Focusing more on life style issues and their relationship with functional health data by the Alameda County. Study (Wingard *et al.*, 1982) suggested people can improve their health via exercise, enough sleep, maintain healthy body weight, limiting alcohol use and avoiding smoking. Thus health and illness can coexist and even people with multiple chronic disease or terminal illness can consider themselves healthy if they focus more of life style (Jadad, 2013).

Healthy child development :

Early child development is now regarded as an important health determinant as there are new evidences on the effects of early experiences on brain development, school readiness and health in later life. The Physical, social, mental, emotional and spiritual development of a child is greatly affected by his or her housing and surrounding, family income, parents, education, availability of good quality and sufficient quantity of food, genetic make up and medical care. Positive stimulations early in life improves behavior and health in adulthood.

Biology and genetic endowment :

The organic make up of the human body is the fundamental determinants of health. The

genes inherited by an individual greatly affects the health status. Although socio-economic factors and physical environment are important determinants of overall health. In some circumstances the genetic constitution of an individual predisposes certain diseases or health problems. Studies in neuro endocrinology have confirmed that when optimal conditions are provided for early development of a child (between conception and age 5). The brain develops normally and has a positive outcome for a life time. Any disturbance in optimum condition affects development of brain and ultimately the health status in adulthood.

Health services :

Many diseases and injury preventing health services have been designed to maintain and promote health. These health services include good medical care, treatment and prevention method, etc. some health services like immunization and use of mammography are showing positive results and must be continued in order to maintain overall progress.

Gender :

Gender refers to series of society determined roles, personality, traits, attitude, behavior, values, relative power and influence which the society renders to the two sexes on a differential basis. Many health issues are gender based. It has been shown by various studies that men are more likely to die prematurely than women, largely due to heart diseases, cancer, fatal accidents, suicides, etc. and this is approximately three times as high for men aged twenty to thirty five. Women live longer than men but they are more likely to suffer from depression, stress (often due to efforts to balance family life and work), chronic conditions like arthritis, osteoporosis, allergies and family violence.

Culture :

Some persons or groups may face accidental health risk due to dominant culture values that perpetuate conditions such as marginalization, stigmatization, loss of language and culture and lack of access to health care services. There is evidence that in spite of major improvement in health care services since 1979, infant mortality rate among First National People, in 1994 was almost twice as high as among the Canadian population. The prevalence of major chronic diseases like heart problems, hypertension, diabetes, arthritis, etc. is significantly high in different parts of the world and is continuously increasing.

The social determinants of health are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live and work. These circumstances are shaped by distribution of money, power and resources at global, national and local level. The maintenance and promotion of health is achieved through different combinations of physical, mental and social well being, together sometimes referred to as “health triangle” (Nutter, 2003). The social health determinants are mostly responsible for health inequities, the unfair and unavoidable differences in health status seen within and between countries. Health equity and social determinants are regarded as critical components of the post 2015 sustainable development global agenda and a step towards progressive achievement of universal health coverage.

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