

Assignment – 6

Subject: Write an article about Health and Hygiene based on your study and research using appropriate pictures (250 Words)

Article

THE FAST FOOD TRAP

Cheap, quick, addictive and driving India into a health and hygiene emergency.

Walk through any Indian city today and the bright signs of burger chains and fried chicken outlets are impossible to miss. Fast food has embedded itself into urban culture, offering quick, cheap meals to busy professionals and students. But what looks like convenience is fast becoming a public health disaster, an epidemic of poor diet, rising disease, and environmental fallout. What was once considered an occasional treat has now turned into a daily habit for millions, a habit that health experts are calling the new **urban epidemic**



India, like many other countries, is undergoing a major “nutrition transition”. In what characterizes rapidly changing dietary patterns, there is a significant shift away from traditional diets, which were high in fiber and comprised mostly whole foods, to more western-style diets, which are processed and high in calories. This change has coincided with rapid economic progress and urbanization along with a surge in the consumption of packaged and processed foods (popularly called “junk foods”).

Junk foods are foods that are high in calories, sugars, unhealthy fats, and salt but low in nutrients. These foods are often highly processed and are typically low in fiber, vitamins, and minerals. Examples of junk foods include fast food items like burgers, fries, and pizzas, sugary snacks like cookies, candies, and sodas, and salty snacks like chips and pretzels. Consuming junk food regularly can lead to various health problems, including obesity, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and dental issues. These foods are often convenient and appealing but offer little nutritional value.

A Growing Appetite

The fast-food industry in India is booming. Valued at USD 18.6 billion in 2024, it is projected to almost double by 2033 (*IMARC Group*). Urban households now spend more on processed foods and beverages than ever before, sometimes outpacing traditional staples like rice and pulses. For many young Indians, pizza and burgers are no longer indulgences, they're daily meals.

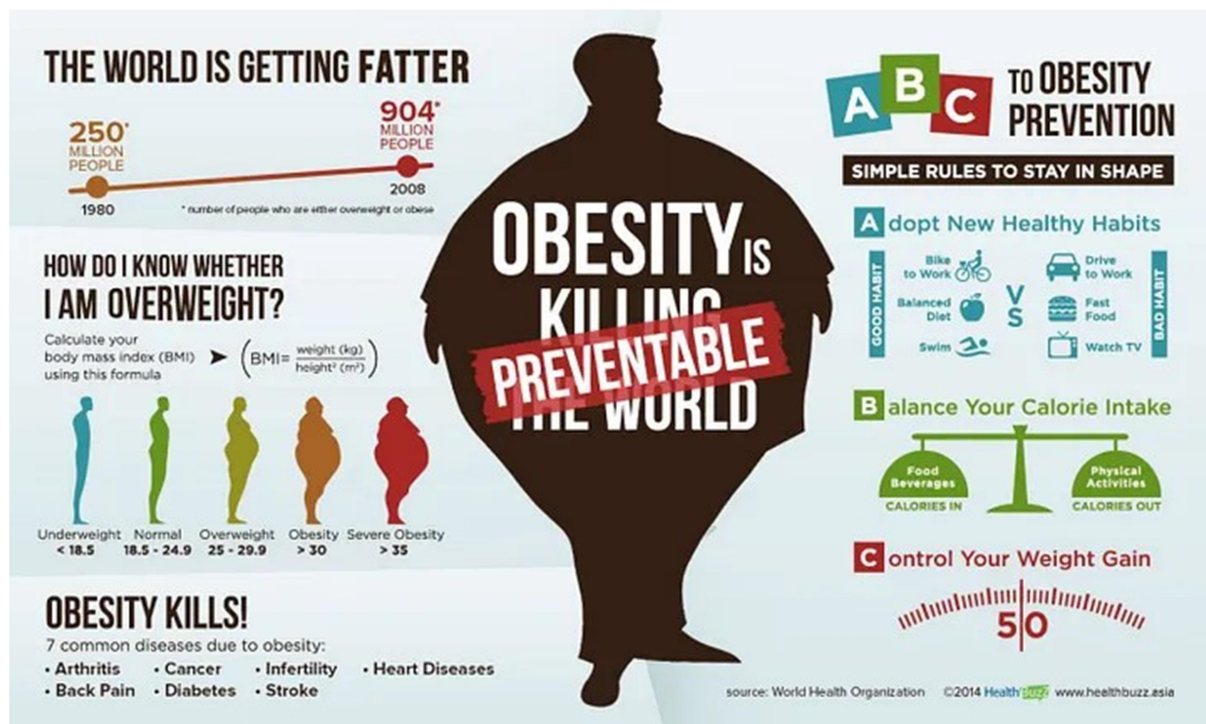
But this rapid rise comes with a heavy cost. "We are replacing nutritious, home-cooked meals with calorie-dense, nutrient-poor foods," warns Dr. Anoop Misra, a leading diabetologist, highlighting the dangers of the shift.

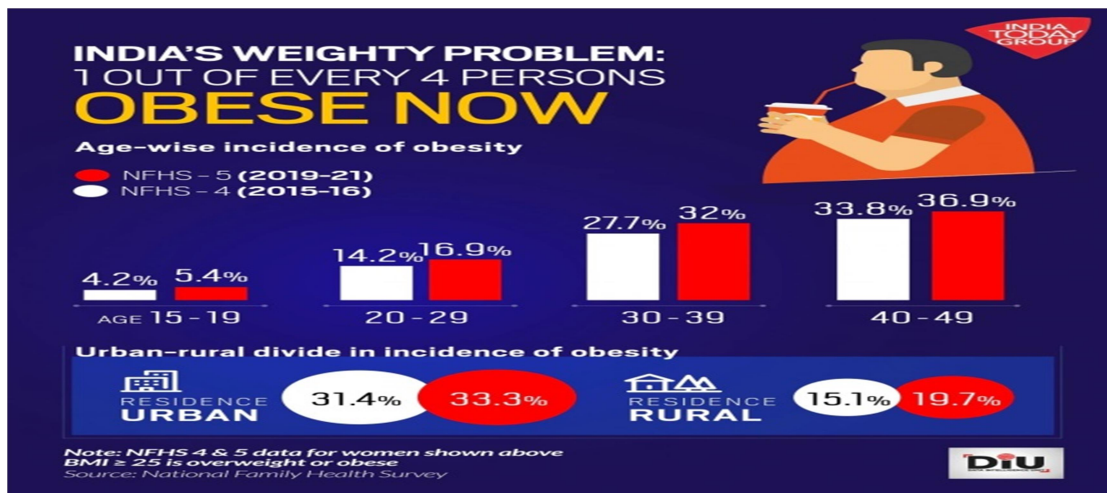
The Health Toll

The link between fast food and non-communicable diseases is becoming alarmingly clear. According to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR, 2023), India now has over 101 million people living with diabetes, with urban prevalence almost double that of rural areas (16.4% vs. 8.9%).

Obesity rates are also climbing. National surveys show that over 20% of Indian women and 19% of men are overweight or obese (NFHS-5, 2021). In states like Punjab, obesity has increased by nearly 10 percentage points in just five years. A 2024 study further revealed that 71% of Indians are metabolically unhealthy, even among those who appear slim (Times of India, 2024).

For India's youth, the story is equally concerning. Research conducted in South India found that 59% of overweight or obese high school students consumed fast food daily, often while watching television (ResearchGate, 2023).





Effects of Aggressive Advertising:

A significant factor to consider while analyzing the evolving dietary habits of Indians is the influence of aggressive advertising to promote “tasty” and “affordable” comfort foods, particularly aimed at younger consumers.

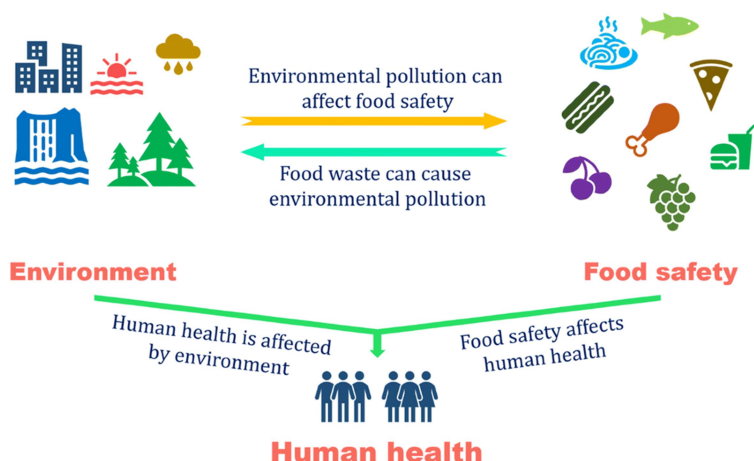
According to a pan India survey conducted by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), 93% of children ate food that was packaged, 68% drank packaged sweetened beverages more than once a week, and 53% ate these foods at least once a day.

At the same time, the ultra-processed food industry in India has expanded at a compound annual growth rate of 13.37% between 2011 and 2021. Moreover, India’s food processing industry is predicted to be worth USD 535 billion by 2025-26.

Hygiene and Environmental Concerns

Fast food also raises questions about hygiene. Large-scale preparation often leads to lapses in safety, with the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) reporting cases of contamination from poor handling and unclean kitchens. Meanwhile, the industry’s packaging- plastic cups, wrappers, disposable cutlery—adds to urban waste, clogging drains and worsening sanitation.

Environmentalists point out that the epidemic extends beyond diets. “We are not only consuming unhealthy food but also creating mountains of plastic waste every day,” says Sunita Narain of the Centre for Science and Environment.

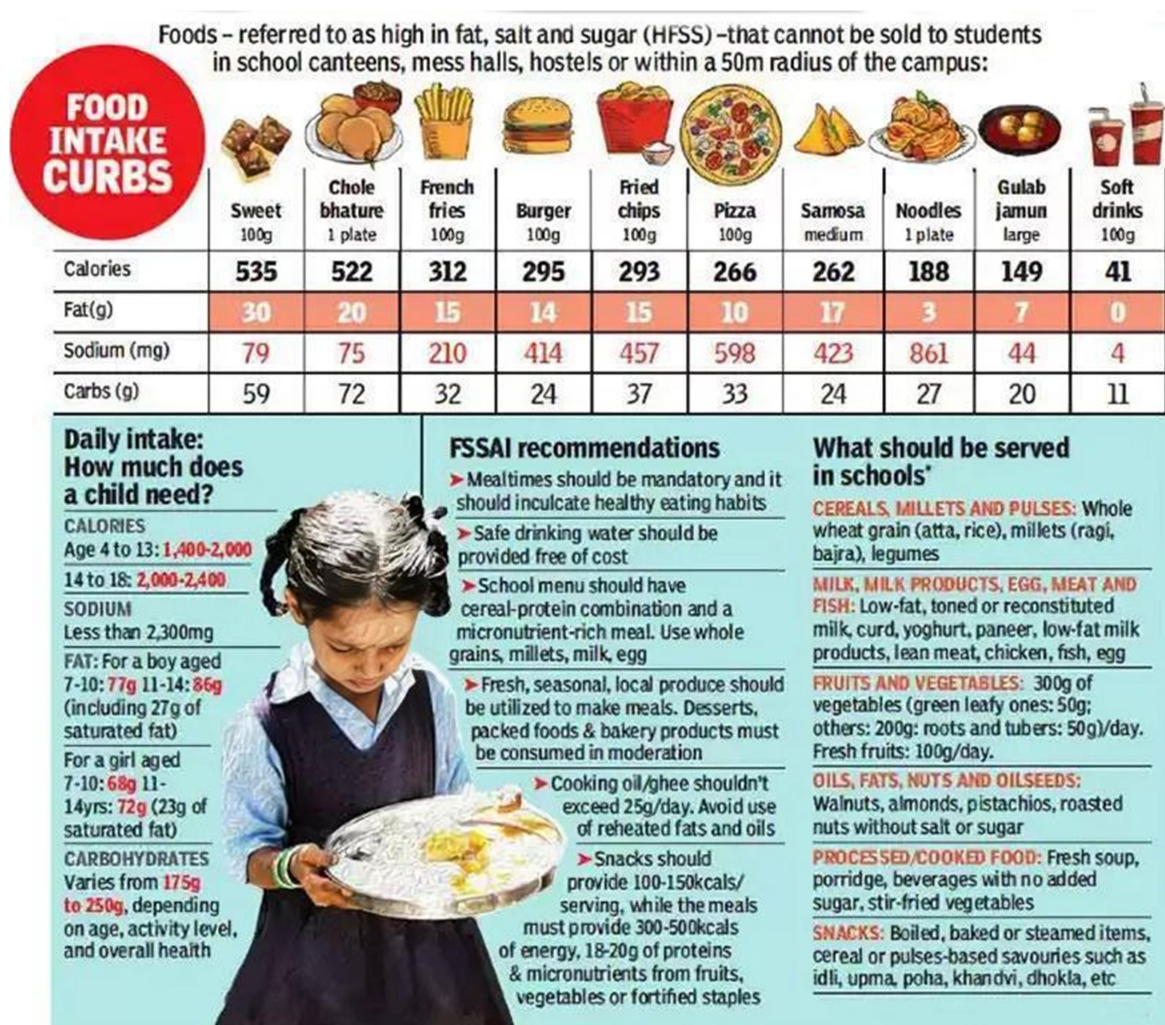


Fighting Back

Public health experts argue that India cannot afford to ignore this crisis. They recommend:

- Nutrition labeling on menus to warn consumers.
- Restrictions on junk-food ads targeting children.
- Awareness campaigns to revive healthier, traditional diets.
- School and workplace initiatives to replace fast food with balanced alternatives.
- Relooking FSSAI Regulation The first step would be to bring about a comprehensive regulation to clearly define what is 'healthy,' and 'unhealthy,'

Some state governments are beginning to act. Kerala, for instance, has discussed higher taxes on junk food to discourage overconsumption, while Delhi has considered guidelines limiting processed foods in school canteens. But nationwide enforcement remains patchy



The Bigger Picture

India has made progress in tackling infectious diseases and improving sanitation, yet fast food threatens to reverse these gains by fuelling non-communicable diseases. The stakes are high: with a young population and rapidly urbanizing workforce, the cost of inaction could cripple the nation's health system. As diabetologist Dr. Anoop Misra puts it, "Fast food may save you time today, but it will cost you years tomorrow."

It is critical to acknowledge the urgency of switching to healthier diets and creating public demand or, as Prime Minister calls it, a “Jan Andolan” or people’s movement, for healthy and nutritionally diverse diets. These efforts must be accompanied by sincere policy interventions that help Indians exercise their right to make informed food choices.

By opting for whole, minimally processed foods rich in nutrients, fiber, and essential vitamins, individuals can reduce their intake of unhealthy additives, excessive sugars, and refined grains commonly found in processed foods. This proactive approach not only supports better physical health but also promotes mental clarity and sustained energy levels.

References

- *IMARC Group (2024), India Fast Food Market Report*
- *Indian Council of Medical Research (2023), India Diabetes Report*
- *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2021)*
- *Times of India (2024), Obese or Slim, Over 71% Indians Metabolically Unhealthy*
- *ResearchGate (2023), Fast Food Consumption in South Indian Students*
- *FSSAI (2022), Food Safety Report*
- *The Hindu (2024), “Toss out the junk food, bring back the healthy food plate”*

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