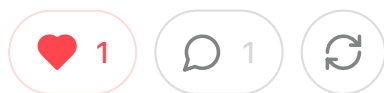


POSHAN GHAR OP-ED

Decoding UNICEF India's Advocacy for Healthy Diets: Nutrition Brief Series Promoting Healthy Diets Across All Age Groups

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Good nutrition is essential across the lifecycle, shaping growth, development, and long-term well-being. This op-ed draws on UNICEF India's Advocacy for Healthy Diets: Nutrition Brief Series, which brings together evidence and guidance that India can advance toward nutrition security. Summarising six key themes—diets for young children, nutrition for adolescent girls and women, women's food, saying no to junk food, nutrition diversity, and the cost and affordability of healthy diets; the piece highlights the practical actions needed to make healthy diets more accessible and achievable for all. It underscores the importance of supportive policies, informed families, and stronger food environments to help every child in India grow, thrive, and live healthy.

Good nutrition is essential across the lifecycle as it plays a critical role in development, and overall health at every stage. From the very first feedings to food choices, every decision shapes the health story of our lives. Good nutrition and healthy diets is not just about filling plates; it's about fuelling futures. A balance of vitamins, minerals, and nutrients builds strong bodies, sharp minds, and resilient spirits.

To support this vision, UNICEF India has developed the Advocacy for Healthy Diets Nutrition Brief Series. This six-part series brings together evidence, insights, and practical guidance on how India can advance toward nutrition security. Each brief explores a different dimension of the country's food and nutrition landscape and outlines practical ways to make healthy diets more accessible and achievable for all.

The six themes include:

- Promoting healthy diets for young children
- Nutrition for adolescent girls and women
- Women's right to food
- Saying no to junk food
- Nutrition diversity
- The cost and affordability of a healthy diet

Whether you are a policymaker, practitioner, or researcher, this series provides essential direction for designing and scaling efforts that help every individual in India grow, thrive, and live healthy. This op-ed captures the essence of the series.





[1/6]
**Promoting
Healthy Diets for
Young Children**



[2/6]
**Adolescent Girls &
Women's Diets**



[3/6]
**Women's
to Foo**



[4/6]
**Say No to Junk
Food**



[5/6]
**Nutrition
Diversity**



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**The Cost
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Image: UNICEF India

Nutrition Brief 1 of 6 – Promoting Healthy Diets for Young Children

The first brief in the series focuses on a critical window in human development: infancy and early childhood. Good nutrition from conception through the first two years supports healthy growth and brain development. For mothers, a balanced diet protects their own health and contributes to safe pregnancies and healthy children.

babies. As children grow, adequate nutrition continues to shape their learning potential, physical development, and resilience to disease. The brief sets out what a healthy diet looks like for infants and young children. It highlights the importance of early initiation of breastfeeding, exclusive breastfeeding for six months, and complementary feeding thereafter. It also outlines the barriers families face, such as limited affordability to the growing presence of ultra-processed foods in the market.

It calls for systemic solutions, from stronger regulation on processed foods to more informed and contextual infant and young child feeding counselling, and sensitive social protection. It emphasises strengthening breastfeeding and complementary feeding practices, improving caregiver knowledge, addressing structural barriers, and supporting families through well-designed policies and programmes. **Access brief 1 [here](#).**

Nutrition Brief 2 of 6 – Adolescent Girls & Women's Diets

The second brief in the series focuses on a vital, yet often overlooked, stage of life: adolescence and womanhood. Adolescence represents a "second window of opportunity" to address developmental gaps, build human capital, and correct early-life nutritional deficits. Well-nourished adolescent girls and women are more likely to excel in education, pursue economic opportunities, and break cycles of poverty, while undernourished girls and women face compounded risks for themselves and their children.

The brief outlines what a healthy diet looks like for adolescent girls and women and provides practical, context-specific strategies to make it part of daily life, such as ensuring a nutritious breakfast and healthy snacks. It highlights the roles that families, frontline workers, and workplaces can play in supporting health while addressing deeper issues such as unequal food distribution and th

influence of ultra-processed foods.

It calls for cross-sectoral actions, including improved local food environments, integrating nutrition literacy into education, promoting supportive norms for nutrition as a shared responsibility, and strengthening service delivery platforms such as schools, anganwadi centres, and workplaces. **Access brief 2 [here](#).**

Nutrition Brief 3 of 6 – Women's Right to Food

The third brief in the series highlights a persistent and often overlooked issue: women and girls eating last and least. Malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies among women in India remain widespread and multifaceted. These gaps are not driven by food scarcity alone; they are rooted in socio-cultural norms, food insecurity, discriminatory household practices, limited awareness, and economic constraints. Unequal access to nutritious food creates lasting deficits in diet quality, impacting women's health and well-being, and reduces the effectiveness of development programmes designed to support them.

The brief outlines what is needed to ensure women and girls receive adequate nutrition each day. It calls for nutrition programming that recognises how household dynamics shape who eats, when, and what. It presents practical, context-specific strategies—from strengthening women's decision-making power and reducing poverty to promoting equitable food habits and improving monitoring systems. This brief offers a valuable roadmap for making food and nutrition systems more inclusive and responsive to the needs of women and girls across India. **Access brief 3 [here](#).**

Image: UNICEF India

Nutrition Brief 4 of 6 – Say No to Junk Food

The fourth brief in the series highlights a rising public health challenge in increasing consumption of junk food and its impact on nutrition and long health. It examines how foods high in fat, salt, and sugar (HFSS) and ultra-processed foods (UPFs), often heavily marketed, are steadily replacing balanced diets. Drawing on evidence from India and global research, the brief shows how frequent consumption of these foods heightens risks of obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and other NCDs, particularly among children and adolescents. It also illustrates how shifting preferences and easy availability are normalising unhealthy eating across all age groups.

The brief outlines a comprehensive agenda to curb junk food consumption and protect dietary diversity. It calls for stronger front-of-pack labelling, tighter regulation of marketing to children, healthier school food environments, and measures that discourage unhealthy choices. It also underscores the importance of community awareness, family-level changes, and renewed focus on seasonal and home-cooked foods. **Access brief 4 [here](#).**

Nutrition Brief 5 of 6 – Nutrition Diversity

The fifth brief in the series highlights the essential role of dietary diversity supporting lifelong health and preventing nutritional deficiencies. From infancy to adulthood, nutrition shapes physical growth, cognitive development, and overall well-being. Diets dominated by processed foods contribute to micronutrient deficiencies, obesity, and rising non-communicable diseases. The brief underscores that no single food can meet all nutrient needs; a balance of pulses, fruits, vegetables, dairy, eggs, nuts, and oils is required across the life course.

It explores what is needed to make dietary diversity a daily reality, examining factors like affordability, availability, cultural norms, gender dynamics, and shifting food environments. It introduces the Rainbow Diet as a simple, practical approach and provides recommendations for families, schools, policymakers, and front-line workers. **Access brief 5 [here](#).**

Nutrition Brief 6 of 6 – The Cost and Affordability of Healthy Diets in India

The sixth brief in the series addresses a critical challenge in India: the cost and affordability of healthy diets. It examines the cost and affordability of healthy diets, showing how food prices, household income, and spending patterns influence diet quality across the country. Drawing on national datasets and global frameworks, it offers an updated picture of what healthy diets cost, how affordability differs across regions and groups, and why financial constraints often push families toward less nutritious options.

The brief also lays out what it will take to make healthy diets consistently accessible. It explores how economic pressures, social factors, and food environments steer households toward cheaper, calorie-dense foods, and identifies key pathways, from stronger supply chains for perishables to nutrition-resp

public programmes, that can help shift diets toward healthier choices. **Article 6 [here](#).**

Stay tuned with Poshan Ghar for more updates on the series across our platforms, newsletters, and op-ed features.

Have stories, insights, or case studies on health, nutrition, WASH, child protection, or social behaviour change? We would love to hear from you. Reach out at arpita.d@zealgrit.com.

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 Liked by Poshan Ghar

Fantastic synthesis of UNICEF's nutrition framework. The Women's Right to Food br nails something most nutrition programs miss completely, that household hierarchie eats before any dietary guidelines or awareness campaigns kick in. I saw similar patte with a community health initiative in semi-urban Maharashtra where women would s habitully even when food was available. Curious tho whether the affordability brief a regional price fluctuations in perishables cause that seemed like the biggest barrier trying to diversify.

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