

Nutritional Assessment as a Foundation for Preventive Nutrition and Public Health

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DESCRIPTION

Nutritional assessment is a fundamental component of nutrition and food sciences, providing essential information for evaluating dietary adequacy, identifying malnutrition and guiding interventions to improve health outcomes. It is a multidimensional process that integrates dietary, biochemical, anthropometric and clinical indicators to assess an individual's or population's nutritional status. Accurate nutritional assessment is important for detecting deficiencies, monitoring public health programs, guiding clinical care and informing research and policy decisions related to diet and health.

Dietary assessment is one of the primary approaches in nutritional evaluation. It involves quantifying food and nutrient intake to determine whether an individual's diet meets recommended dietary standards. Common methods include 24-hour dietary recalls, Food Frequency Questionnaires (FFQs), dietary records and direct observation. Advances in technology, such as mobile applications and digital food records, have improved the accuracy and convenience of dietary assessment, facilitating large-scale nutritional studies and personalized nutrition interventions.

Anthropometric measurements are widely used to assess body composition and growth, particularly in children and vulnerable populations. Indicators such as Body Mass Index (BMI), Mid-Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC), waist-to-hip ratio and skinfold thickness provide valuable information about undernutrition, overweight, obesity and central adiposity. In children, growth charts and z-scores for height-for-age, weight-for-age and weight-for-height are essential for monitoring stunting, wasting and underweight. Anthropometry is cost-effective, non-invasive and easily standardized, making it suitable for both clinical practice and community surveys.

Biochemical assessments provide objective measures of nutrient status and metabolic health. Blood, urine and tissue analyses can detect deficiencies or excesses of macronutrients and micronutrients, as well as markers of metabolic function. Biochemical markers are sensitive and specific, but their interpretation must account for factors such as inflammation,

hydration, age and physiological state. Integrating biochemical data with dietary and anthropometric measures enhances the precision of nutritional assessment.

Clinical assessment involves evaluating physical signs and symptoms that indicate nutritional deficiencies or excesses. These may include hair and skin changes, oral and dental health, muscle wasting and edema. Clinical evaluation complements dietary, anthropometric and biochemical methods, providing a comprehensive understanding of an individual's nutritional status. In public health and clinical settings, combining multiple assessment methods improves diagnostic accuracy and informs appropriate interventions.

Nutritional assessment also plays a vital role in the prevention and management of diet-related chronic diseases. Monitoring nutrient intake, body composition and metabolic markers helps identify individuals at risk of obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and micronutrient deficiencies. It also supports the development of personalized dietary interventions aimed at optimizing health outcomes. At the population level, nutritional surveys and surveillance programs provide data for policy formulation, food fortification programs and community-based nutrition initiatives.

Emerging tools and technologies have further advanced nutritional assessment. Biomarkers of dietary intake, metabolomics, wearable devices and digital tracking systems allow more precise, real-time evaluation of nutritional status and dietary patterns. These innovations facilitate research on nutrient-gene interactions, personalized nutrition and the impact of diet on long-term health. Despite technological advances, fundamental principles of standardized measurement, validity and reliability remain essential for accurate assessment.

In conclusion, nutritional assessment is a multidimensional process vital for understanding dietary adequacy, identifying malnutrition and guiding interventions to promote health. By integrating dietary, anthropometric, biochemical and clinical measures, professionals can obtain a comprehensive picture of nutritional status at individual and population levels. Advances in technology and analytical methods continue to enhance

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assessment capabilities, supporting precision nutrition, public health strategies and disease prevention. Ensuring accurate and comprehensive nutritional assessment is essential for improving

health outcomes, guiding policy and advancing the field of nutrition and food sciences.