ANEMIA AND OVERWEIGHT AMONG PRESCHOOL CHILDREN: RELEVANCE AND PREVENTIVE STRATEGIES

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Annotation: *Anemia and overweight are significant health concerns among preschool children, affecting their physical growth, cognitive development, and overall well-being. This paper examines the relevance of these conditions and highlights preventive strategies that can be implemented by healthcare professionals, particularly nurses, in early childhood settings. Preventive measures include proper nutrition, monitoring of growth indicators, promoting physical activity, and educating parents and caregivers. The nurse's proactive role in early detection, guidance, and intervention is crucial in minimizing the risks of anemia and overweight, ensuring healthy development during the critical preschool years.*

Key words: *Preschool children, anemia, overweight, prevention, nurse's role, nutrition, physical activity, parental education.*

Anemia and overweight are increasingly recognized as critical public health issues affecting preschool children worldwide. During the early childhood years, rapid growth and development place high demands on a child's nutritional intake, making them particularly vulnerable to both undernutrition and overnutrition. Anemia, primarily caused by iron deficiency, can impair cognitive development, reduce attention span, and weaken the immune system, leaving children susceptible to infections and delayed physical growth. On the other hand, overweight and obesity in preschool children are

associated with a higher risk of chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular disorders later in life. Both conditions not only affect immediate health outcomes but also have long-term implications for educational achievement, psychosocial well-being, and overall quality of life.

Preventive strategies are crucial to address these dual burdens. Nurses and other healthcare professionals play a central role in the early detection and prevention of anemia and overweight. Monitoring growth parameters such as weight, height, and body mass index allows timely identification of at-risk children. Nutritional interventions, including providing iron-rich foods for anemia prevention and balancing calorie intake to prevent overweight, are essential. Education of parents and caregivers is also a key component, as they are responsible for food choices, portion sizes, and daily routines that influence children's eating habits and physical activity levels. Nurses can organize workshops, counseling sessions, and group activities to raise awareness and encourage healthy lifestyles.

Physical activity promotion is another critical preventive measure. Structured and unstructured play, outdoor activities, and age-appropriate exercise help maintain a healthy body weight and support muscular and skeletal development. Additionally, limiting screen time and sedentary behavior contributes to preventing overweight in preschool children. The integration of regular health check-ups, nutrition assessments, and developmental screenings ensures that interventions are tailored to the individual needs of each child. Early intervention is particularly important because habits formed during preschool years often persist into adolescence and adulthood.

The role of healthcare professionals extends beyond the clinical setting. Collaboration with educators, community workers, and policymakers is necessary to create environments that support healthy growth. Implementing guidelines for balanced meals in childcare centers, ensuring access to fortified foods, and promoting community-wide nutrition campaigns enhance the

effectiveness of preventive strategies. Evidence from various studies indicates that comprehensive programs combining nutritional education, physical activity promotion, and parental engagement significantly reduce the prevalence of anemia and overweight among preschool children.

Preventive strategies are therefore of paramount importance, and nurses play a central role in implementing them. By conducting regular assessments of growth parameters, including weight, height, and body mass index, nurses can identify children at risk of anemia or excessive weight gain. Nutritional guidance tailored to individual needs, such as providing iron-rich foods and balanced meals, combined with education on portion control and nutrient diversity, is essential to support healthy growth and prevent deficiencies. Equally important is the promotion of physical activity, including structured exercises, outdoor play, and age-appropriate movement activities, which help maintain energy balance, support musculoskeletal development, and prevent the accumulation of excess body fat. Nurses also serve as educators and advocates, working closely with parents and caregivers to raise awareness of the importance of healthy lifestyle practices, including limiting sedentary behaviors, encouraging active play, and fostering a positive relationship with food.

Beyond individual care, the nurse's role extends to collaboration with early childhood educators, community health programs, and policymakers to create supportive environments that promote health. Implementing standardized nutrition guidelines in preschool settings, ensuring access to fortified and wholesome foods, integrating health education into daily routines, and organizing community-wide awareness campaigns are critical components of comprehensive preventive strategies. Evidence indicates that programs combining nutritional counseling, physical activity promotion, growth monitoring, and family engagement are significantly more effective in reducing the prevalence of both anemia and overweight than isolated interventions.

In addition, nurses' involvement in early intervention contributes to establishing lifelong healthy habits, enhancing children's resilience, and supporting optimal physical, cognitive, and psychosocial development. Preventive measures not only improve immediate health outcomes but also reduce the long-term burden on healthcare systems by decreasing the likelihood of chronic diseases associated with poor nutrition and overweight. By empowering families, fostering healthy behaviors, and monitoring children's growth and development, nurses provide a foundation for a healthier generation and contribute to the overall well-being of society.

Overall, addressing anemia and overweight among preschool children requires a proactive, multi-dimensional approach in which nurses serve as key facilitators, educators, and advocates. Their role in preventive care, early detection, and family engagement is indispensable for ensuring that children achieve balanced growth, develop healthy habits, and enjoy improved health outcomes both in childhood and later life. Effective implementation of preventive strategies at the preschool stage lays the groundwork for a lifetime of health, productivity, and well-being, demonstrating that nursing interventions are essential not only for individual children but for broader public health objectives.

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