



**Better nutrition,  
particularly  
during pregnancy  
and lactation,  
is essential to  
women's health**

# Why

is better nutrition, particularly during pregnancy and lactation, essential to women's health?

More than half of Indian women, including those pregnant and breastfeeding, are anaemic. This has serious consequences for women themselves and for the health, nutrition and development of their children.

Women need more nutrition when they are pregnant and breastfeeding

- Pregnant women need to eat a varied diet to ensure that their children are born healthy and have a lower risk of being malnourished, developing poorly, or dying.
- Breastfeeding mothers need to eat a plentiful diet to store the energy and nutrients they require to breastfeed successfully.

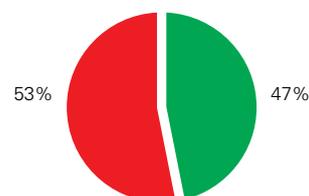
Iron and folic acid supplements and iodized salt improve a woman's chances of having a healthy infant

- Pregnant women need iron and folic acid supplements daily to prevent anaemia and deliver a healthy child with a normal birth weight, who is not anaemic and grows and develops well.
- Consumption of iodized salt prevents iodine deficiency during pregnancy, and can prevent miscarriage and brain damage in the unborn child.

## Where are we today?

In India, one woman in three between 15 and 49 years of age is malnourished; this proportion is one in two among women in the lowest wealth quintile.

Prevalence of anaemia among women (15-49 years) (%)



Prevalence of anaemia among pregnant women (15-49 years) (%)



Prevalence of anaemia among breastfeeding women (15-49 years) (%)



■ Anaemic ■ Not anaemic

Source: NFHS-3, 2006

## How to improve nutrition for all women, including pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers?

Promote coordination, enhance coverage

- Promote coordination among relevant ministries to develop national policies and guidelines to improve nutrition for women, particularly during pregnancy and lactation.
- Enhance coverage of nutrition improvement programmes for pregnant and breastfeeding women, with emphasis on reaching women from scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and lower wealth quintiles.

Improve capacity, use local resources

- Improve the capacity and performance of primary care level providers and counsellors to give nutrition counselling and support to pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers.
- Use local resources and opportunities such as local governance groups, mothers' committees, self help groups, senior women groups and frontline workers to enhance outreach and increase nutrition care and support for women when pregnant and breastfeeding.