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Health and Illness

Nursing Foundation

Concepts of health, illness and wellness, dimensions of health, factors affecting health, levels of prevention, health-illness continuum and determinants of health.

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03. HEALTH AND ILLNESS

1. Concept of Health

Health is a multidimensional state involving physical, mental and social well-being.

The WHO Constitution describes health as encompassing complete physical, mental and social well-being rather than merely the absence of disease.

Health is dynamic and is influenced by personal, social and environmental conditions.

2. Important Definitions

Term	Meaning
Health	Overall well-being and functional ability
Wellness	Active pursuit of improved well-being
Disease	A pathological disturbance of body structure or function
Illness	Personal experience of poor health
Sickness	Social recognition or experience of being unwell
Disability	Interaction between impairments and environmental or personal barriers affecting participation

3. Concepts of Health

Biomedical Concept

Health is viewed primarily in terms of absence of disease.

Ecological Concept

Health depends on interaction between individuals and their environment.

Psychosocial Concept

Psychological and social conditions influence health.

Holistic Concept

Health involves the interaction of physical, psychological, social, cultural and spiritual factors.

4. Dimensions of Health

- Physical health: Effective functioning of body systems.
- Mental health: Psychological well-being.
- Emotional health: Recognition and management of emotions.
- Social health: Healthy relationships and participation.
- Spiritual health: Meaning, values and purpose.
- Occupational health: Safe and satisfactory working conditions.
- Environmental health: Safe surroundings and resources.

5. Determinants of Health

Determinant	Examples
Biological	Age, genetics and physiological factors
Behavioural	Nutrition, exercise and substance use
Environmental	Housing, sanitation and pollution
Social	Education, relationships and social support
Economic	Income, employment and affordability
Healthcare	Availability, quality and accessibility of services

6. Health-Illness Continuum

Health and illness exist along a changing continuum.

Severe illness -> Poor health -> Reduced functioning -> Stable functioning -> Improved wellness -> Optimal well-being.

A person with a chronic disease can still experience meaningful wellness and good functional ability.

7. Types of Illness

Acute Illness

Typically has a relatively sudden onset and short duration.

Examples: Acute gastroenteritis, influenza.

Chronic Illness

Persists over a prolonged period and may require ongoing management.

Examples: Diabetes mellitus, hypertension, chronic kidney disease.

Communicable Illness

Caused by infectious agents that may spread directly or indirectly.

Examples: Tuberculosis, measles.

Non-Communicable Illness

Not transmitted as an infectious disease between individuals.

Examples: Cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes.

8. Effects of Illness

- Physical discomfort
- Functional limitations
- Emotional distress
- Financial difficulties
- Changes in family responsibilities
- Social isolation
- Occupational difficulties
- Altered self-image

9. Illness Behaviour

Illness behaviour refers to how individuals recognize symptoms, interpret their health condition and seek healthcare.

Influencing factors include beliefs, previous experiences, culture, social support and healthcare accessibility.

10. Levels of Disease Prevention

Level	Purpose	Examples
Primordial	Prevent development of risk factors	Healthy urban planning and tobacco-control policies
Primary	Prevent disease occurrence	Immunization, sanitation and healthy nutrition
Secondary	Detect and treat disease early	Blood pressure screening and cancer screening
Tertiary	Reduce complications and disability	Stroke rehabilitation and diabetic foot care
Quaternary	Reduce harm from unnecessary medical intervention	Avoiding inappropriate tests or treatments

11. Health Promotion

Health promotion enables individuals and communities to improve control over their health.

Major measures include:

- Health education
- Balanced nutrition
- Physical activity

- Safe drinking water
- Sanitation
- Immunization
- Tobacco cessation
- Mental health support
- Appropriate preventive screening

12. Models of Health

Health Belief Model

Health behaviour is influenced by:

- Perceived susceptibility
- Perceived severity
- Perceived benefits
- Perceived barriers
- Cues to action
- Self-efficacy

Biopsychosocial Model

Health and illness result from interactions between biological, psychological and social factors.

13. Role of Nurses in Health Promotion

- Assess individual health needs.
- Provide health education.
- Support immunization programmes.
- Identify risk factors.
- Encourage preventive screening.
- Promote healthy behaviours.
- Support disease management.
- Facilitate rehabilitation and referrals.

Important Examination Questions

1. Define health and explain its dimensions.
2. Describe factors affecting health.
3. Explain the health-illness continuum.
4. Discuss levels of disease prevention.
5. Differentiate acute and chronic illness.

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6. Explain the nurse's role in health promotion.

Conclusion

Health and illness are influenced by interconnected biological, psychological, social and environmental conditions. Nurses contribute across the entire health-illness continuum through prevention, treatment, education and rehabilitation.

Quick Revision

- Health involves physical, mental and social well-being and changes with personal and environmental conditions.

- Disease is a pathological disturbance; illness is the individual experience of poor health.

- Acute illness is usually sudden and short; chronic illness persists and may need ongoing management.

- Health determinants include biological, behavioural, environmental, social, economic and healthcare factors.

- Primary prevention prevents disease, secondary prevention detects it early and tertiary prevention reduces complications.

- The Health Belief Model includes perceived susceptibility, severity, benefits, barriers, cues to action and self-efficacy.

Practice questions

Choose one best answer. The answer key and explanations follow the questions.

1. Blood pressure screening is an example of which level of prevention?

A. Primary
B. Tertiary
C. Secondary
D. Primordial

2. Which term describes a person's personal experience of poor health?

A. Disease
B. Disability
C. Wellness
D. Illness

3. Which model explains health through biological, psychological and social interactions?

A. Biomedical concept
B. Biopsychosocial model
C. Ecological concept
D. Health Belief Model

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Answer key and explanations

1. C - Secondary

Secondary prevention detects and treats disease early.

2. D - Illness

Illness refers to the personal experience of poor health.

3. B - Biopsychosocial model

The biopsychosocial model combines these three influences.

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