



Impact of Nutrition in Children and their Outcomes in Different Stages of Life

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DESCRIPTION

Maternal and child health nutrition is the field of study and practice that aims to improve the nutritional status and well-being of women and children, especially during the critical periods of pregnancy, lactation and early childhood. Nutrition plays a vital role in the health and development of mothers and their children, as it affects their survival, growth, immunity, cognitive function and chronic disease risk.

According to United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the nutritional status of women is unacceptably poor in many parts of the world. Far too many women especially adolescents and those who are nutritionally at-risk are not receiving the nutrition services they need to be healthy and give their babies the best chance to survive, grow and develop. Women's diets in many countries contain limited fruits, vegetables, dairy, fish and meat. During pregnancy, poor diets lacking in key nutrients like iodine, iron, folic acid, calcium and zinc can cause anaemia, pre-eclampsia, haemorrhage and death in mothers. They can also lead to stillbirth, low birth weight, wasting and developmental delays for children. UNICEF estimates that low birth weight affects more than 20 million newborns every year. Poor nutrition during breastfeeding makes it more challenging for mothers to replenish their nutrient stores and meet their additional dietary needs.

The consequences of poor nutrition for children are also severe and long-lasting. Undernutrition which includes stunting (low height for age), wasting (low weight for height) and micronutrient deficiencies affects more than 140 million children under five years of age globally. Undernutrition increases the risk of infections, mortality, impaired cognitive development and reduced school performance. It also has intergenerational effects, as undernourished girls are more likely to become undernourished mothers. On the other hand, over-nutrition which includes overweight and obesity affects more than 40 million children under five years of age globally. Over-nutrition increases the risk of non-communicable diseases, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and some cancers. It also has economic and social costs, as overweight and obese children are

more likely to face discrimination, bullying and low self-esteem. Improving maternal and child health nutrition requires a multisectoral and life-course approach that addresses the underlying determinants of nutrition, such as food access and affordability, gender inequality and social and cultural norms. It also requires evidence-based interventions that target specific nutritional needs and gaps at different stages of life.

Some of the key interventions for improving maternal nutrition include:

- Promoting healthy eating, micronutrient supplementation (iron and folic acid or multiple micronutrients, and calcium), deworming prophylaxis, weight gain monitoring, physical activity, and rest during pregnancy.
- Supporting exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life and continued breastfeeding up to two years or beyond with appropriate complementary feeding.
- Providing nutrition counseling, education and support to pregnant and lactating women through health workers, community volunteers or peer groups.
- Improving access to nutritious foods through social protection programmes, food fortification or bio-fortification initiatives.
- Testing innovations for improving women's nutrition during pregnancy and breastfeeding, such as shaping markets to help increase access to low-cost, high-quality micronutrient supplements for women.

Some of the key interventions for improving child nutrition include:

- Promoting optimal infant and young child feeding practices, including early initiation of breastfeeding within one hour of birth.
- Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life.
- And appropriate complementary feeding from six months onwards with continued breastfeeding up to two years or beyond.
- Providing micronutrient supplementation (vitamin A, zinc) or fortification (iron) to prevent or treat deficiencies in children less than five years of age.

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- Managing acute malnutrition through community-based programmes that provide ready-to-use therapeutic foods or other specialized foods for severely malnourished children.
- Preventing overweight and obesity through promoting healthy diets (low in sugar, salt and fat) and physical activity among children under five years of age.
- Strengthening nutrition surveillance systems to monitor trends and identify gaps in maternal and child nutrition outcomes.

development of women and children. By addressing the multiple causes and consequences of malnutrition, from undernutrition to over-nutrition, we can ensure that mothers and their children have access to adequate nutrition services and care throughout their life course. This will not only improve their survival and well-being, but also contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and a more equitable and prosperous world.

CONCLUSION

Maternal and child health nutrition is a crucial area of intervention that can have lasting benefits for the health and