

Nutrition lays the foundation for human health and development. Good nutrition is particularly important to the growth and development of infants and young children during the critical 1,000 days between a woman's pregnancy and her child's second birthday. Leading scientists, health experts, and economists agree that improving nutrition during this critical window is one of the best and most cost-effective investments we can make to achieve lasting progress in global health and development.

The Global Need

Today, the world is facing multiple burdens of malnutrition, with populations suffering from stunting, micronutrient deficiencies, overweight/obesity, and diet-related non-communicable diseases.

Maternal and Child Survival: Malnutrition is the underlying cause of 45% of all child deaths. Approximately 800,000 child deaths per year could be prevented if children were breastfed exclusively during their first 6 months.

Early Childhood Development: Nearly 1 in 4 children suffer from physical and cognitive stunting caused by chronic undernutrition. Yet a growing body of scientific evidence indicates that children who are well-nourished early in life have healthier brain development, stronger immune systems, fewer chronic diseases, and higher IQs.

Noncommunicable Diseases: Good nutrition during pregnancy and childhood decreases the risk of prematurity, fetal or infant death, anemia, and subsequent obesity. Studies show that children who are breastfed have lower rates of mortality, meningitis, asthma and other respiratory illnesses, bacterial and viral infections, ear infections, juvenile diabetes, allergies, obesity, some chronic liver diseases, and some types of cancers.

Make nutrition a policy priority

- Increase funding for the U.S. Agency for International Development's maternal and child nutrition programs.
- Integrate nutrition programs with support for caregivers to encourage early stimulation and learning.
- Integrate nutrition-sensitive programming into health, agriculture, water, sanitation and hygiene, social protection, and education.
- Implement the U.S. government's Global Nutrition Coordination Plan.
- Promote health literacy, with nutrition labeling as well as educational campaigns and curricula that identify obesity as a form of malnutrition.

Proven Solutions

Good nutritional outcomes begin with the mother. Poor maternal nutrition impairs fetal development and contributes to low birth weight and stunting. Children who are stunted from chronic nutritional deprivation can suffer irreversible effects, including a weak immune system that increases their chances of dying from common illnesses and diseases, and impaired brain development that hurts their chances to learn at school and work productively later in life.

Increasing rates of exclusive breastfeeding is critically important to reducing preventable child deaths and ensuring long-term health, wellbeing, and productivity.

Addressing malnutrition will save lives, reduce inequalities, and build strong and resilient individuals, families, communities, and populations. Effective interventions to combat malnutrition are well known, but they need to be scaled up to have a significant impact. Good nutrition, healthy active living, and malnutrition/hunger prevention programs are critical for all children.

