



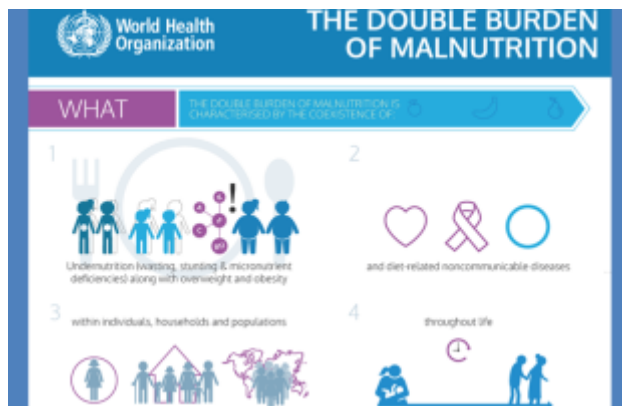
## Nutrition

### Double burden of malnutrition

The double burden of malnutrition is characterised by the coexistence of undernutrition along with overweight and obesity, or diet-related noncommunicable diseases, within individuals, households and populations, and across the lifecourse.

In the context of a changing global nutrition landscape, influenced by economic and income growth, urbanization, demographic change and globalization, diet-related epidemiology has seen a significant shift in recent decades.

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WHO/NHD

### Burden

In 2014, more than 1.9 billion adults worldwide, 18 years and older, were overweight while 462 million were underweight. More than 600 million were obese. In the same year, 42 million children under the age

### Related links

- [Joint child malnutrition estimates - Levels and trends](#)
- [Undernutrition early in life](#)
- [Noncommunicable diseases Fact sheet](#)
- [Sustainable Development Goal 3: Health](#)
- [Preventing disease through healthy environments A global assessment of the burden of disease from environment risks](#)

### Related topics

- [Cardiovascular diseases](#)
- [Child health](#)
- [Child malnutrition](#)
- [Chronic diseases](#)
- [Diet and physical activity](#)
- [Health promotion](#)
- [Nutrition](#)
- [Maternal health](#)
- [Obesity](#)

of five were overweight or obese but 156 million were affected by stunting (low height-for-age). While 50 million children were affected by wasting (low weight-for-height). Poor nutrition continues to cause nearly half of deaths in children under five, while low- and middle-income countries now witness a simultaneous rise in childhood overweight and obesity – increasing at a rate 30% faster than in richer nations.

This double burden of malnutrition can exist at the individual level – for example obesity with deficiency of one or various vitamins and minerals, or overweight in an adult who was stunted during childhood – at the household level – when a mother may be overweight or anaemic and a child or grandparent is underweight – and at the population level – where there is a prevalence of both undernutrition and overweight in the same community, nation or region.

Moreover, the relationship between undernutrition and overweight and obesity is more than a coexistence. Reflected in the epidemiology and supported by evidence, undernutrition early in life – and even in utero – may predispose to overweight and noncommunicable diseases such as diabetes and heart disease later in life. Overweight in mothers is also associated with overweight and obesity in their offspring. Rapid weight gain early in life may predispose to long-term weight excess. These are just some of the examples of biological mechanisms, which along with environmental and social influences, are increasingly understood as important drivers in the global burden of malnutrition across the lifecourse.

## Opportunity

This double burden of malnutrition offers a unique and important opportunity for integrated action on malnutrition in all its forms.

Addressing the double burden of malnutrition will be key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (in particular Goal 2 and Target 3.4) and the Commitments of the Rome Declaration on Nutrition, within the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition.

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### Multimedia

[Infographic: Double burden of malnutrition](#)

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### Programme and activities

[Department of Nutrition for Health and Development](#)

[Infographic: Global Nutrition Targets 2025](#)

[Video: WHO-FAO: Second International Conference on Nutrition](#)

Department of Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health

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### Technical information

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### Publications

[Action Plan to Reduce the Double Burden of Malnutrition in the Western Pacific Region](#)  
pdf, 1.963Mb

[Double-duty actions for nutrition: policy brief](#)

[Infant and young child feeding](#)

[Maternal health](#)

[Overweight and obesity](#)

[Nutrition and pregnancy](#)

[The double burden of malnutrition: policy brief](#)

[The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2015](#)

[WHO guidelines on nutrition](#)

[Recommendations for healthy diets](#)

[WHO Noncommunicable Diseases Action Plan 2013-2020](#)

[WHO Global Coordination Mechanism on the Prevention and Control of NCDs](#)

[Joint child malnutrition estimates - Levels and trends \(2015 edition\)](#)

[Severe acute malnutrition](#)

[Moderate malnutrition](#)

[WHO's work on nutrition](#)

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**FOOTNOTE: While we recognise the importance vitamin and mineral related overnutrition, it does not form part of this definition.**