

# Transforming Global Health Begins with Improving Child Nutrition



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A White Paper inspired by recent findings from the Gates Foundation

**For both the Gates Foundation and The Foundation for Fresh Produce, addressing child malnutrition is not only a moral imperative but also a crucial step in preventing a range of chronic diseases in adulthood. By implementing targeted policies and interventions, and with broad support, The Foundation for Fresh Produce believes we can improve health outcomes for future generations through fruits and vegetables.**

Proper childhood growth and development requires a nutrient-dense diet that includes fruits and vegetables. But when these foods aren't available, or aren't consumed in recommended amounts, young bodies don't have the nourishment needed to maintain a healthy immune system, build strong bones, or support brain health.



Recent findings from the Gates Foundation align with our mission and vision. In Bill Gates' article in [The Economist](#), he predicts that "between 2024 and 2050, some 40 million additional children will be stunted and 28 million will suffer wasting,"<sup>1</sup> due to the combined effects of the global Covid-19 pandemic, conflict, inflation, and climate change. Tens of millions of children will suffer from malnutrition and fail to reach their full potential, both mentally and physically.

This is not merely a problem for the future. Currently, over 400 million children are at risk of malnutrition and are not getting the nutrients they need to grow and thrive. This finding produces additional, devastating consequences, including increased susceptibility to infections, stunted growth, higher mortality rates, and negative economic impacts. In the near and short term, these children are in need of specific, life-saving nutrition interventions. In the long term, nutrient-dense foods, especially fruits and vegetables, will provide the critical vitamins and minerals needed to continue to support overall health throughout their lifespan.

# The Current State of Child Malnutrition

From 2000 to 2020, the world experienced a 'global health boom.' Child nutrition and health improved dramatically and then the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Coupled with compounding crises like conflict, climate related events, and increasing costs, this halted progress and eliminated or reduced many of the public health gains.

Globally, one in four children are living in severe food poverty during early childhood, which amounts to 181 million children under the age of 5.<sup>1</sup> Even if children have access to food, they may not be able to access the key nutrients needed for growth, development, and a healthy diet.

Recent statistics from the World Health Organization show<sup>2</sup> the following based on statistics published in March 2024:

- 149 million children under age 5 are estimated to be stunted (too short for their age), 45 million are estimated to be wasted (too thin for their height), and 37 million are overweight or living with obesity.
- Nearly half of deaths among children under 5 years of age are linked to undernutrition.
- The developmental, economic, social, and medical impacts of the global burden of malnutrition are serious and long-lasting, not only for individuals and their families, but also for entire communities and countries.

Two of the United Nations' [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDG) focus on the importance of reducing hunger and food insecurity (SDG 2) and improving health and wellbeing (SDG 3). The SDG 2 target to end hunger and ensure access to nutritious and sufficient food by 2030 is not on track and needs significant investments to catch up to where progress should be.<sup>3</sup>

## Globally, Among Children Under Age 5:

**1 in 4** live in severe  
food poverty



That amounts to  
**180,000,000 children<sup>1</sup>**

**149,000,000**  
are stunted in growth

**45,000,000**  
are underweight

**37,000,000**  
are overweight or  
living with obesity<sup>2</sup>

**Nearly half  
of deaths are  
linked to  
malnutrition<sup>2</sup>**



# Child Malnutrition Has Long-Term Consequences

Just as child malnutrition can lead to stunted growth, weakened immune systems, and developmental delays, the repercussions of malnutrition can significantly affect adult health outcomes.<sup>4</sup>

## Heart Disease

The long-term effects on blood pressure regulation, lipid metabolism, and arterial health can also lead to higher risks of cardiovascular diseases.

## Stroke

Brain development and vascular health is impaired, increasing the likelihood of cerebrovascular events, including hypertension and stroke.

## Diabetes

Insulin resistance and impaired glucose metabolism can lead to metabolic issues, including increasing the likelihood of type 1 and type 2 diabetes.

## Obesity

Inadequate nutrition can lead to long-term metabolic changes and body composition, increasing the likelihood of obesity.

## Diet-Related Cancers

A weakened immune system, chronic inflammation, altered gene expression, and metabolic changes can increase the risk of certain cancers.

Additional economic consequences compound the situation as well. Malnourished children are less likely to thrive in school (if they even have the opportunity to attend school in the first place), and as a result, are more likely to remain in poverty. A perpetual cycle of economic disadvantage ensues, its consequences, on health, nutrition, and even the broader local and global economy, are long-lasting and dire in myriad ways.

**Childhood malnutrition can significantly affect adult health outcomes leading to increased risk of:**

**Heart Disease**

**Stroke**

**Diabetes**

**Obesity**

**Diet-Related Cancers**

# Good Childhood Nutrition Builds a Foundation for Lifelong Health

The first 1,000 days of a child's life, spanning from conception to their second birthday, are critical for establishing a foundation for lifelong health. **From pregnancy to infancy to early childhood, research shows that nutrition during this period significantly influences a child's physical and cognitive development. It also proves immensely beneficial for their immune function and long-term health outcomes.**

Take a look at child nutrition in these areas:

## Pregnancy

During pregnancy, when a mother consumes a diet rich in fruits and vegetables, the fetus is provided with the essential vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants needed to support the growth and development of the organs, immune system, and brain. Folate, found in high amounts in many leafy greens, prevents neural tube defects, while vitamin C, which can be found in citrus fruits and red and green peppers, aids in the development of a baby's immune system and bones and muscles.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the foods consumed during a mother's pregnancy can influence her child's future food preferences and lead to healthier eating habits down the road.

## Infancy and Early Childhood

Because the period from birth to two-years-old is marked by rapid growth and brain development, adequate nutrition is essential for cognitive development, physical growth, and the establishment of healthy eating patterns. For instance, foods rich in fiber support healthy digestion and can prevent childhood obesity. The antioxidants in fruits and vegetables also help protect against infections and chronic diseases.







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**“I believe we can start a second global health boom by getting children the nutrients they need to thrive.”**

–Bill Gates

**In alignment with the insights from global dietary guidance and well renowned public health organizations, like the Gates Foundation, The Foundation for Fresh Produce affirms our core mission. The Foundation is dedicated to transforming global health by improving child nutrition through increasing access to fresh produce.**

The proof is in the pudding: **Good nutrition in the first 1,000 days has compounding, positive, long-lasting effects.** When this happens, children can naturally learn to make better dietary choices in adulthood, which can contribute to overall, lifelong well-being.

A balanced diet also **aligns with WHO dietary guidelines** by promoting diverse and nutritious food options that include fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, and whole grains.

By consuming the daily recommended amount of fruits and vegetables, people can reduce their risk of nutrition-related chronic conditions, boost their immune systems, and promote overall health.

That’s why in December 2019, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and WHO jointly promoted the consumption of fruits and vegetables as part of a healthy diet to combat malnutrition and non-communicable diseases (NCDs) like diabetes, certain cancers, and heart disease. In turn, the UN General Assembly declared 2021 the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables in an effort to raise awareness about their benefits and encourage sustainable production and consumption practices.



# Let's Work Together to Solve the Global Fruit and Vegetable Consumption Crisis



**“When children eat well, families thrive, communities grow strong, and we all move closer to a healthier future.”**

–Lauren M. Scott, President of The Foundation for Fresh Produce

The Foundation for Fresh Produce offers a clear solution to the problem of poor nutrition among children. We bring leaders, partners, donors, and organizations together to grow a healthier world.

By sharing resources, tackling complex problems, and increasing our overall reach and impact, we work together to bring innovative minds and creative solutions to the proverbial table. When we build relationships with one another and work toward long-term change together, strategic collaboration is born. Ample opportunities for learning and development naturally occur.

The Foundation for Fresh Produce is interested in partnering with stakeholders around the world to change the trajectory of human health, particularly when it comes to child nutrition.

**Partners like you make a lasting difference in improving child nutrition by removing the barriers preventing greater fruit and vegetable consumption.**

After all, your partnership with The Foundation supports the programmatic solutions that address these barriers. **Our proven approach increases fruit and vegetable consumption through four key programs:**

## **Boost Appeal**

Improve the appeal and drive the demand of fruits and vegetables as an integral part of people's daily diets through culturally relevant and inspirational consumer education.

## **Improve Access**

Support infrastructure development and supply chain solutions that remove barriers and improve access to fruits and vegetables.

## **Nurture Fruit and Vegetable Professionals**

Inspire life-long fruit and vegetable champions through professional development, educational experiences, and resources.

## **Scale Partner Impact**

Establish strategic alliances and cultivate stakeholder engagements that strengthen our collective global impact.

# Let's change the trajectory of human health and transform child nutrition, together.

To join the mission contact Eboni Wall, [ewall@freshproduce.com](mailto:ewall@freshproduce.com)  
or visit [freshproduce.com/foundation](https://freshproduce.com/foundation)

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## About The Foundation for Fresh Produce

The Foundation for Fresh Produce is growing a healthier world by changing the trajectory of human health. We believe fruits and vegetables are the answer and we must remove barriers that prevent people from eating them. The Foundation boosts the appeal of fruits and vegetables as an integral part of people's diets, improves access, nurtures passionate fruit and vegetable professionals, and scales partner programs that strengthen our collective global impact. To join in changing the trajectory of human health, visit [freshproduce.com/foundation](https://freshproduce.com/foundation) to learn more and donate. For consumer inspiration and professional nutrition education, go to [fruitsandveggies.org](https://fruitsandveggies.org).