

Nutrition in contemporary South Africa[#]

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Abstract

In South Africa, both under- and over-nutrition exist. At national level, more than half of the females are either overweight or obese, while children suffer from under-nutrition. Childhood malnutrition starts early in life, with the first two years being the most vulnerable period. Chronic malnutrition (as indicated by the prevalence of stunting) is a bigger problem than acute malnutrition (as indicated by the prevalence of wasting). Stunted children have a higher risk for being overweight. At national level, 33.3% of preschool children are vitamin A deficient, 21.4% are anaemic and 5.0% suffer from iron deficiency anaemia. Prevalence figures for childhood malnutrition differ between and within provinces. South African children consume a maize-based diet that is inadequate in energy and of low nutrient density. Inadequate intake of micronutrients starts during infancy. Strategies to address micronutrient malnutrition include high-dose vitamin A supplementation, food fortification, biofortification and dietary diversification. The availability of a greater variety of nutritious foods at community and household level can be increased through mixed cropping, the introduction of new crops, the promotion of underexploited traditional food crops, and home-gardens. A broad multifaceted comprehensive health intervention programme is needed to address childhood malnutrition.

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