

Understanding & Recognizing Malnutrition

Project Bududa, Uganda



Glossary

A

Acute malnutrition. Synonymous with “wasting.” See “wasting” for a full definition.

Anemia (Anaemia). A non-communicable medical condition characterized by abnormal red blood cell count. Often caused by nutritional deficiencies (e.g. iron, folate, vitamin B-12, vitamin A), genetic predisposition (haemoglobinopathies), and/or infectious diseases (e.g. malaria, tuberculosis, HIV, parasites). Symptoms typically include weakness, fatigue, and dizziness.

B

Bitot’s Spots. Dry, discolored, triangular patches on the whites of the eyes. Often caused by vitamin A deficiency.

Body Mass Index. A formulaic weight-for-height comparison commonly used to diagnose dietary diseases. Can be mathematically calculated by dividing a person’s bodily mass (in kilograms) by the square of their height (in meters); alternatively, a BMI chart can be used for evaluation.

C

Calcium. A micronutrient crucial to bone formation, as well as blood clotting and muscle contraction. Can be found in dairy products and certain vegetables.

Carbohydrate. A type of macronutrient and broad term for a variety of sugars. Can be found in fruits, vegetables, and certain grains.

Chronic energy deficiency. Insufficient energy/nutrient intake sustained over a long period of time. Synonymous with “stunting” and “chronic malnutrition.” See *“stunting” for a full definition.*

Chronic malnutrition. Insufficient energy/nutrient intake sustained over a long period of time. Synonymous with “stunting” and “chronic energy deficiency.” See *“stunting” for a full definition.*

D

Dietary non-communicable diseases. A broad term for a variety of non-infectious medical conditions caused by malnutrition (e.g. hypertension, diabetes).

E

Energy deficiency. Insufficient energy/nutrient intake. Synonymous with “undernutrition.” See *“undernutrition” for a full definition.*

F

Fats. A type of macronutrient crucial to energy storage, organ protection, and cellular function. Unhealthy types include trans fats (from processed foods) and saturated fats (from fatty animal products). Unsaturated fats (from nuts, seeds, fish, and certain vegetables) are healthier, but should still be eaten in limited amounts.

Folate. A micronutrient crucial to red blood cell formation, growth, and function. Can be found in dark green vegetables, beans, nuts, and certain fruits.

Folic acid. A synthetic form of folate. Synonymous with “folate” and “vitamin B-12.” See *“folate” for a full definition.*

Food fortification. A type of nutritional supplementation that increases micronutrient levels in select foods to account for deficiencies. Types include mass, universal, and targeted fortification.

G

Goiter (Goitre). Visible frontal neck swelling associated with enlargement of the thyroid gland. Can result from iodine deficiencies.

H

Hemoglobin. A protein in red blood cells that carries oxygen throughout the body.

Hypertension. A non-communicable medical condition characterized by abnormally high blood pressure. Often caused and/or worsened by poor diet, physical inactivity, and genetic predisposition; can only be diagnosed through a blood pressure reading.

I

Intake. The amount of something consumed by an individual.

Immunity. In the context of medicine, the body's ability to fight off infectious diseases.

Iodization. A type of food fortification that increases iodine levels in select foods (e.g. salt). Iodine enhances mental capacity and brain function.

Iron. A micronutrient crucial to hemoglobin production, as well as hormone formation. Can be found in dairy products and certain vegetables.

M

Macronutrient. A type of nutrient that the body needs in large amounts (*i.e.* carbohydrates, proteins, fats).

Malnutrition. An imbalanced state of energy and/or nutrient intake; may also refer to inadequate bodily absorption and utilization of consumed nutrients. Types include undernutrition and overnutrition.

Mass fortification. A type of food fortification that increases micronutrient levels in foods most frequently consumed by a population.

Micronutrient. A type of nutrient that the body needs in small amounts (*i.e.* vitamins, minerals).

Micronutrient deficiency. Lacking important vitamins and minerals for proper nourishment. In Uganda, common micronutrient deficiencies include vitamin A, vitamin B-12, folate, iron, zinc, and calcium.

Mild chronic malnutrition. The least severe form of stunting; generally characterized by a BMI value greater than or equal to 17, but less than or equal to 18.4.

Moderate acute malnutrition. The least severe form of wasting; BMI measures vary depending on the individual and context.

Moderate chronic malnutrition. A semi-severe form of stunting; generally characterized by a BMI value greater than or equal to 16, but less than or equal to 16.9.

N

Non-communicable (non-infectious). In the context of medicine, a descriptor for illnesses that can't be acquired through typical modes of acute transmission (*i.e.* coughing, sneezing, physical contact). Examples include hypertension, malnutrition, and anemia.

Nutrient. An essential substance that the body needs for growth, maintenance, and general survival; types include macronutrients and micronutrients.

Nutritional intervention. A process or initiative meant to improve nutrition in a particular population by addressing nutritional (*e.g.* food provision, food fortification) and non-nutritional factors (*e.g.* socialization, healthcare).

Nutritional supplementation. A dietary addition that either fully or partially makes up for a nutritional deficiency; includes food fortification.

Nyctalopia (night blindness). Vision impairment characterized by extreme difficulty or complete inability to see in low-light conditions.

O

Obesity. A severe type of overnutrition generally characterized by a BMI value greater than or equal to 30.

Oedema (edema). Visible swelling of the limbs and extremities caused by a build-up of fluid in the body. Often caused by low protein levels, limited physical activity, and other comorbidities (*e.g.* cancer, cardiovascular disease).

Overnutrition. A type of malnutrition characterized by abnormal, harmful fat accumulation. Often caused by excessive energy and nutrient intake; types include overweight and obesity.

Overweight. A moderate type of overnutrition generally characterized by a BMI value greater than or equal to 25, but less than or equal to 29.9.

P

Pallor. Unusual paleness or whitish coloring of the skin. Often caused by anemia or other blood-related illnesses.

Protein. A type of macronutrient crucial to muscle growth and maintenance. Can be found in animal meats, fishes, seafood, tofu, nuts, seeds, and beans.

R

Refeeding. A process or initiative meant to improve nutrition in a particular population by changing the total provision of food.

S

Severe acute malnutrition. The most extreme form of wasting; BMI measures vary depending on the individual and context.

Severe chronic malnutrition. The most extreme form of stunting; generally characterized by a BMI value less than 16.

Sodium. The standard scientific name for “salt,” a savory food seasoning. Consuming excess sodium can worsen hypertension.

Stunting (shortness). Low height for age caused by long-term undernutrition. Generally characterized by a BMI value that’s less than 18.5; can be mild, moderate or severe.

T

Targeted fortification. A type of food fortification that increases micronutrient levels in foods most frequently consumed by a segment of the population (e.g. school-children).

U

Undernutrition. A form of malnutrition characterized by nutrient and energy deficiencies. Types include wasting, stunting, underweight.

Underweight. Low weight for age caused by short-term and/or long-term undernutrition.

Universal fortification. A type of food fortification that increases micronutrient levels in foods most frequently consumed by a population of people and animals (e.g. livestock).

V

Vitamin A. A micronutrient crucial to vision, immunity, and bodily growth. Can be found in animal and organ meats, certain fishes and oils, colorful fruits, green/yellow/orange vegetables, dairy, and fortified cereals. Vitamin A deficiency can lead to anemia, nyctalopia, and other chronic diseases.

Vitamin B-9. Synonymous with “folate” and “folic acid.” See “*folate (folic acid)*” for a full definition.

Vitamin B-12. A micronutrient crucial to nerve cell maintenance and DNA formation. Can be found in animal and organ meats, fish, poultry, eggs, and dairy. Vitamin B-12 deficiency can cause anemia and diminished mental capacity.

W

Wasting (thinness). Low weight for height caused by short-term undernutrition; can be moderate or severe.

X

Xerophthalmia. A broad term for a variety of vision impairments and abnormalities, including Bitot’s spots and nyctalopia.



Z

Zinc. A micronutrient crucial to immunity, as well as cellular function and growth. Can be found in red meats, poultry, certain seafood, beans, nuts, whole grains, fortified cereals, and dairy.

Common Abbreviations

BMI: Body Mass Index

CED: chronic energy deficiency (stunting; chronic malnutrition)

CED I: chronic energy deficiency, grade I (mild)

CED II: chronic energy deficiency, grade II (moderate)

CED III: chronic energy deficiency, grade III (severe)

MAM: moderate acute malnutrition (wasting)

SAM: severe acute malnutrition (wasting)

VAD: Vitamin A deficiency

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