

Hunger in the womb raises risk of diabetes

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Exposure to hunger in the uterus raises the risks of high blood sugar levels in later life, claim Dutch and Chinese researchers in the journal *Diabetes*.

The existence of a link between exposure to hunger in the uterus and chronic ailments such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease is not in itself a new finding. This correlation was established by researchers in Amsterdam a few years ago in a study on the long-term effects of the 'Hunger Winter' in the Netherlands in 1944. Russian researchers could not, however, confirm this link on the basis of data from the starvation suffered in Leningrad during the Second World War.

The Wageningen and Chinese researchers assessed data on almost eight thousand Chinese who were exposed to food shortages during the decade 1951 to 1961. They looked for one region where this [food shortage](#) was very severe and another where it was moderate. They also distinguished between exposure in the [womb](#) and that during infancy. The risk of raised blood sugar and [type 2 diabetes](#) was more than double for people who were born in the region with severe food shortages and were exposed to hunger in the womb, compared to others who were not exposed to hunger at this stage. Those who were already born when the shortages started and who suffered hunger during infancy did not have these raised risks, and neither did people who lived in the region with moderate food shortages.

The risk of developing type 2 diabetes was greater for people who adopted a Western lifestyle in later life or who belonged to a higher

social class. 'Apparently early exposure to hunger makes people extra vulnerable to type 2 diabetes', says Edith Feskens, professor of Nutrition and [Metabolic Syndrome](#) at Wageningen University and co-author of the article.

Provided by Wageningen University

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