

Mitigating the global malnutrition crisis, with a focus on adolescence

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The period between conception and a child's 2nd birthday (the first 1,000 days) is a particularly critical time for health interventions. However, there are other key, but neglected, tipping points along the lifecycle when it comes to health, and particularly nutrition.

One critical but neglected period is adolescence, particularly in girls.

This age, between 10 -19 years old, is a tipping point for health - the last stop before adulthood for behavioral, biological and social health, because of the potential impact on [birth outcomes](#) as well as the long-term health of women. There is little research around nutrition in the female adolescent population, particularly data that is not associated with pregnancy status. This is about to change.

Filling the Gap

On June 16- 17, the "Forum on International Maternal and Child Nutrition: Initiating Research through Multi-Stakeholder Collaborations," convened by The Sackler Institute for Nutrition Science at the New York Academy of Sciences and Wageningen UR (University & Research centre) at Hotel de Wageningische Berg in Wageningen, will mobilize the international community to adopt new research work. Key influencers—top nutrition researchers, heads of policy organizations, leading program implementation experts, and representatives from public and private institutions in the food and nutrition sector—will gather in a combination of closed-door and public sessions to form partnerships that enhance the understanding of nutrition in adolescence, as well as address three additional research focuses:

- Biological factors that affect micronutrient interventions,
- New tools to evaluate diet and nutritional status, and
- Evidence-based methods for scaling up implementation of interventions.

The research themes are among those that first surfaced in A Global Research Agenda for Nutrition Science, developed by The Sackler Institute for Nutrition Science, in collaboration with the World Health Organization and hundreds of nutrition experts from the non-profit and academic sectors.

"The current dearth of research on adolescent nutrition represents a hindrance to effective intervention design and implementation, but also an enormous opportunity for the [nutrition science](#) field," says Mandana Arabi, MD, PhD, Executive Director, The Sackler Institute for Nutrition Science.

Effective, coordinated, well-funded information will prove critical to developing nutrition interventions that will impact the malnutrition crisis around the world, by impacting the future health of women, as well as their potential offspring.

"To address major nutritional challenges in adolescent health it is essential to join forces in partnerships between academic institutions, NGOs, governments and private partners". This multi-stakeholder strategy will not only provide best evidence but may ensure effective implementation towards improving nutrition and health in a critical period of life.

In addition to the first 1000 days of life, adolescence provides a second chance for improvement", says Frans Kok, PhD, Professor in Nutrition and Health, Head of Division of Human Nutrition, Wageningen University.

Making an Impact

"Adolescence has been largely neglected, sadly, because people have not appreciated the impact that nutrition in adolescence can have on future development and growth," says Zulfiqar Bhutta, PhD, Head, Division of Women and Child Health, The Aga Khan University, who will present at the Forum.

"In the next few years, I hope to see a focus on mechanisms and basic science research—and not just looking at adolescents as a way to

improve birth outcomes; the long-term [health](#) outcomes of adolescents themselves is important," adds Bhutta.

The Forum will catalyse action around such necessary [nutrition](#) science research in the adolescent population and beyond.

Provided by Wageningen University

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