

Food insecurity leads to higher mortality risk, a new study finds

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Craig Gundersen. Credit: L. Brian Stauffer

A wide array of negative health outcomes have been associated with food insecurity including diabetes, depression, and cardiovascular disease. But could food insecurity lead to an increased risk of mortality? According to University of Illinois agricultural economist Craig Gundersen, no one has researched this relationship until now.

In a new study published in *PLOS ONE*, Gundersen and his co-authors find that household food [insecurity](#) is strongly associated with mortality rates in adults. Researchers took data from adults living in Ontario, Canada who participated in the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) in 2005, 2007-08, and 2009-10.

From an 18-question module, participants were classified as "food secure," "marginally food insecure," "moderately food insecure," or "severely food insecure." The researchers then matched the answers to information about the participants' subsequent mortality from the Ontario Registered Persons Database.

Researchers found that the more severe level of food insecure of an individual, the higher the risk of mortality. "We know that those with more severe levels of food insecurity have worse [health](#) outcomes and we found the same with mortality."

Gundersen says the results call for an expansion of policy interventions to reduce food insecurity. "Fortunately, there are proven methods to reduce food insecurity in the U.S. - the most critical being the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) program. And this is one of the most effective ways we can reduce [mortality rates](#), along with other social safety-net programs."

In light of the proven benefits of SNAP in reducing [food insecurity](#) and its consequences, Gundersen argues that a reconsideration of the costs associated with SNAP should be revisited. "When we think about the cost associated with SNAP, of course there's a dollar figure to how much it costs to get people SNAP, but we also have to think about the benefits of it: people living longer because they are getting sufficient levels of [food](#)."

The study, "Food insecurity status and [mortality](#) among adults in Ontario, Canada" is published in *PLOS ONE*. Co-authors include Craig Gundersen, Valerie Tarasuk, Joyce Cheng, Claire de Oliveira, and Paul Kurdyak. The project was funded by Canadian Institutes for Health Research.

More information: Craig Gundersen et al, Food insecurity status and

mortality among adults in Ontario, Canada, *PLOS ONE* (2018). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0202642](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0202642)

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