

WHO against formulated supplementary food for moderate malnutrition

NEW DELHI: The [World Health Organisation](#) (WHO) in its recent guidelines to tackle the global epidemic obesity categorically recommended "not to provide formulated supplementary foods on a routine basis to children [who](#) are moderately wasted or stunted". This recommendation comes as a shot in the arm for the Indian government's consistent stance against packaged supplementary foods which have shown little or no superiority in tackling moderate or even severe malnutrition in several studies conducted across India.

According to the WHO guidelines, within populations with moderate wasting and stunting, [formulated supplementary food](#) should not be used until there is a more definitive evidence base, to avoid increasing the risk of overweight and obesity. Some studies have found that rapid weight gain in infancy and childhood was also strongly associated with the risk of overweight or obesity in adolescence or adulthood.

Based on the findings of the inter-ministerial group on Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) alliance, the health ministry in India had concluded that the management of children with SAM "requires a comprehensive family centric approach involving care-givers instead of a food centric approach".

Nutritional counselling and support is vital in bringing positive change in the knowledge, attitudes and practices of child feeding and care, stated health minister [JP Nadda](#), adding that these findings were shared with the nodal ministry for nutrition, the ministry for women and child development. This is echoed by the WHO guidelines that recommend nutritional counselling by primary care workers to prevent nutrition-related illnesses. In spite of such clear cut recommendations, the Niti

Aayog's newly constituted [Working Group on Nutrition](#) is dominated by international agencies and experts who have been pushing aggressively to introduce formulated supplementary food.

According to the WHO, in 2016, globally an estimated 41 million children under the age of 5 were affected by overweight or obesity. Without effective treatment they are very likely to remain overweight and obese throughout their lives, putting them at risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and premature death, as well as suffering physical and psychological consequences in childhood, observed the guidelines.

The WHO guideline, intended primarily for use in low- and medium-resource settings, focuses on infants and children below 5 years and their caregivers coming to primary health-care facilities. Assessing and managing children at primary health-care facilities to prevent overweight and obesity in the context of the double burden of malnutrition is part of a concerted effort to tackle the global epidemic in obesity including among children. The obesity epidemic is rising most rapidly in low-and middle-income countries, of which, many like India, suffer from the double burden of obesity and undernutrition.

There may be a role for the provision of supplementary foods in settings where there is a high prevalence of wasting or food insecurity, at community or household level, stated the guidelines. However, member states have been advised to put in practice proven nutrition interventions relevant to their country. It was felt that WHO guidelines ought to be reviewed to ensure that recommendations aimed at mitigating the risks of moderate acute malnutrition do not inadvertently increase the risk of obesity and noncommunicable diseases in later life.