

Threatened food security and nutrition since COVID-19

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Balanced nutrition, including the consumption of more healthy foods and fewer unhealthy foods, has a great impact on one's physical and psychological health [1,2]. Even though nutrition is one of the most critical aspects to determine one's quality of life, there are still a lot of problems related to food insecurity and poor nutrition around the world [3,4]. Inadequate nutrition has become an even bigger global problem since Coronavirus Disease-19 (COVID-19) because of a global economic recession and decreased economic mobility based on increased economic inequalities, as well as interrupted food supply chains and rising food prices [5-7]. Further, economic recession results in high unemployment rates and poverty. Individuals who encounter such financial challenges are less likely to purchase healthy foods, which are usually more expensive than unhealthy foods [8]. Thus, those who previously ate more healthy foods may have changed their eating habits to include more unhealthy foods, and this may disproportionately impact disadvantaged groups such as people of color, people with disabilities, women, people in low-income households, etc.

Effects of economic difficulties on food security and nutrition

Regardless of age or generation, food security and nutrition should be ensured for everyone, as individuals who suffer from food insecurity and malnutrition may be less likely to be productive and achieve life goals due to decreased capabilities for physical activity and delayed developmental processes [9,10]. To be a food secure individual with good nutrition, stability in economic resources is mandatory because those in poverty are not able to easily access high quality food. In this context, economic troubles due to COVID-19 make it more difficult to obtain food security and good nutrition. Further, those who have been unemployed since COVID-19 are also more likely to face poor nutrition due to, for example, an increased intake of unhealthy food (e.g., fast food, soft drinks or sodas that contain sugar, alcohol, and snacks) and decreased intake of healthy food (e.g., fruits and vegetables).

Generally, certain underprivileged groups have been at increased risk of food insecurity and poor nutrition even before COVID-19. This phenomenon has worsened since COVID-19 as people remain stuck in poverty and climbing the income ladder becomes more difficult. In other words, since COVID-19 emerged, those at the top of the economic ladder have accumulated more wealth while those at the bottom of the ladder struggle to escape from their original social class [11]. Of course, many people around the world might encounter problems in accessing quality foods; however, those who were already in poverty before COVID-19 have experienced unprecedented serious problems. Therefore, it is necessary to pay more attention to food security and nutrition among people of color, people with disabilities, women, and people in low-income households.

Support for food security

Decreased food security resulting from decreased income and unemployment due to COVID-19 may lead to mental health problems such as hopelessness or depression [12]. Food insecurity and poor nutrition not only influence physical health, but also psychological health. To protect one's food security and nutrition, the government should be responsible for people's loss of livelihoods and limited access to foods in order to prevent a noticeable rise in hunger. First, in the United States, funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Emergency Food Assistance Program through the United States Department of Agriculture should be expanded to help prevent food insecurity during this precarious time. Further, an emphasis should be placed on subsidizing the costs of grocery delivery or curbside pickup services, which often come with an additional delivery fee or minimum purchase amount to qualify for the service, to minimize the exposure of food insecure people to COVID-19 in grocery stores. For instance, the government of Oakland County, Michigan, has subsidized the cost of a grocery delivery service for one year for seniors aged 60 and over, approximately 7% of whom are in poverty. Moreover, as many schools have gone online-only or to a hybrid model so that children are in school fewer days per week, many children who rely on the National School Breakfast or Lunch Program for daily meals are at a disadvantage compared to students who are food secure. Therefore, additional funding should be allotted for schools to distribute such meals to students who are not attending school in-person five days a week. Although these are only a few possible suggestions to address food insecurity and poor nutrition during COVID-19, it is a key issue that governments should be working to address in these ways and others.

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