An estimated one third of under-5 children (178 million) are stunted, whereas 112 million are underweight, making malnutrition the most common ‘disease’ of children.

Global Burden of Maternal and Child Undernutrition and Micronutrient Deficiencies
by Tahmeed Ahmed et al.

Key insights
Most women living in developing countries experience various biologic and social stresses that increase the risk of malnutrition of mother and child. It is imperative to control the problem by scaling up direct nutrition interventions as well as addressing female illiteracy, lack of livelihoods, and women’s empowerment.

Current knowledge
Women who are undernourished at the time of conception are unlikely to improve their nutritional status during pregnancy. Many major adult diseases are associated with impaired intrauterine growth and development. Studies conducted in developing countries on protein-energy malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies show a substantial impact on mortality and disability-adjusted life years.

Practical implications
Priority interventions include breastfeeding promotion, appropriate complementary feeding, essential vitamins and minerals supplementation, and severe acute malnutrition management. Appropriate care of low-birth-weight infants, including feeding, proper hygiene and sanitation, as well as early detection and treatment of complications, can substantially reduce mortality in this highly vulnerable group.

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