



Ensuring good nutrition practices will lead to a healthier population. Poor nutrition can be attributed not only to not eating enough, but also to not eating enough nutritious food such as foods rich in vitamin A and iron. Consumption of high-fat and sugary foods contributes to obesity and may result in a diet that, although high in energy, lacks essential nutrients.

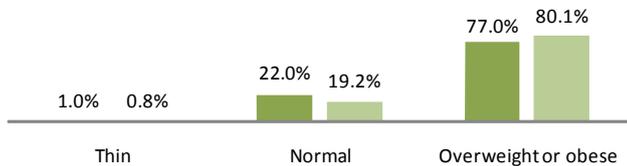
Nutritional status of adults

A key issue for Nauru is that most of the population is reported to be either overweight or obese. Around 27% of men are overweight and more than 50% are obese. The situation is similar for women, with 24% of women overweight and 56% obese.

Body mass index

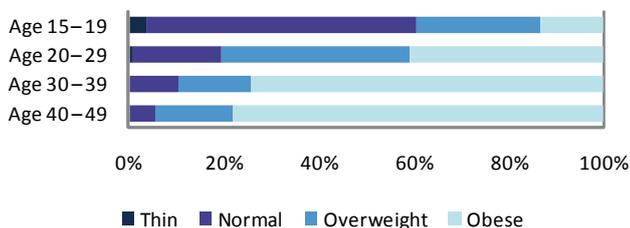
Men and women aged 15–49

■ Men ■ Women

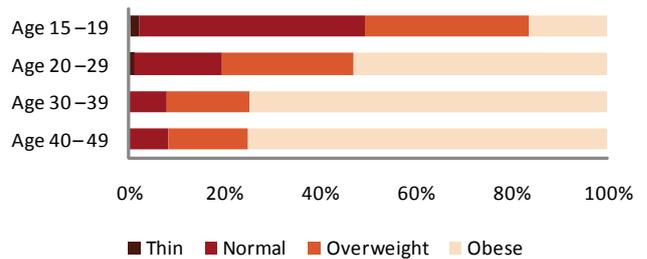


The likelihood of being overweight or obese increases as people age. People are becoming overweight or obese at an early age, however, with 80% of the male population between the ages of 20 and 29 either overweight or obese. This trend was also observed amongst women. Around half of all women aged between 15 and 19 were classified as overweight or obese, and this number jumped to nearly 80% of women aged between 20 and 29 years. By 30 years of age almost all women were classified as either overweight or obese.

Percentage of Nauruan men by BMI and age



Percentage of Nauruan women by BMI and age



Foods consumed by mothers

The nutritional status of mothers during pregnancy and breastfeeding has an important impact on the health and nutritional status of their children.

The survey results indicate that mothers' diets were based mainly on rice and fish. Most women also consumed foods that were high in fat, and more than half consumed foods that were high in sugar.

Micronutrient intake among mothers

Almost all women (99%) reported eating vitamin-A rich foods such as pawpaw, sweet potato, pumpkin and green leafy vegetables, and 97% reported eating iron-rich foods. This, along with the fact that very few women report suffering from night blindness during pregnancy indicates that vitamin A deficiency is unlikely to be a problem in Nauru.

Nutritional status of children

Malnutrition can contribute to child morbidity and mortality. Malnutrition may be caused by not eating enough nutritious foods, poor feeding practices, parasitic infections and poor sanitation.

Overall, 90.9% of children were reported to have consumed foods that are rich in vitamin A, and more than 8 in 10 children had consumed foods rich in iron in the 24 hours preceding the survey.

The uptake of food supplements and de-worming programmes appears to be very low. Ten per cent of children had been given de-worming medication in the six months prior to the survey and 1.2% had been given an iron supplement in the seven days prior to the survey.





Anaemia

Iron anaemia impairs mental capacity, motor development and behaviour of children. If mothers are iron deficient, their children have reduced iron stores that may not be corrected through breastfeeding, and this can lead to anaemia.

Despite the high percentage of women and children who reported consuming iron-rich foods in the 24 hours prior to the survey, one third of women and half the children surveyed were identified as anaemic. The rate of anaemia was higher amongst young boys (57%) than young girls (45%). The high rate of anaemia among women and children may be caused by people not eating enough foods that are rich in vitamin C, which enhances iron absorption, and the low prevalence of using iron supplements.

Anaemia among women and children



Wasting in children

Overall, the prevalence of wasting among children was very low. Only 1% of the children surveyed were reported to fall within the range indicating wasting.

Underweight children

4.8% of children were reported to be underweight; there was a greater incidence of male children being underweight compared with female children.

Infant and young children feeding practices (IYCF)

Most children are breastfed in Nauru, with nearly 96% of children born in the five years preceding the survey being breastfed at some time.

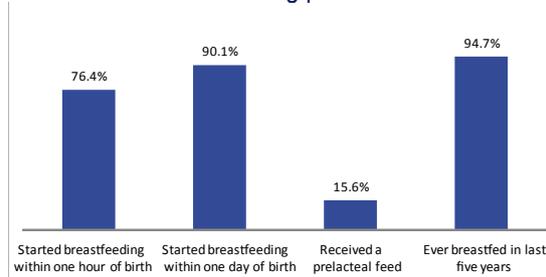
WHO and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) recommend that solid food only be introduced after six months of age. They also recommend that children be exclusively breastfed for six months and that breastfeeding continue for at least 24 months.

The survey indicates that in Nauru, complimentary foods were given to around 6% of children aged 0–5 months. This increases to 68% in the 12–17 month age group, when breastfeeding may have stopped and solid or semi-solid foods are well established.

*For more detailed information on nutrition see chapter 11 in the full Nauru 2007 DHS report.

The mean duration of any breastfeeding among Nauruan children born in the three years preceding the survey was 18.6 months. The mean duration for exclusive breastfeeding was 3.3 months.

Breastfeeding practices



Policy note:

As good nutrition is essential to people’s health, nutrition-related morbidity and mortality are major public health concerns in Nauru. The DHS reported an extremely high proportion of the population as either overweight or obese, with no real differences between men (77.0%) and women (80.1%). These figures, and the fact that people are getting overweight and obese at a young age, calls for very urgent policy attention, not merely to avoid a growing financial burden on the country’s budget and public health system, but to increase life expectancy at birth, which the country’s last census report (2002) estimated at 52.5 and 58.2 years for men and women respectively, the second lowest values in the Pacific. The real tragedy behind these figures is that simple and inexpensive mitigation measures such health education and healthier lifestyles (healthier nutrition and personal exercise) could save the country millions of dollars in treatment of nutrition-related morbidity and many premature deaths.

Although respondents reported that they eat iron-rich food, levels of anemia were very high. While greater use of iron supplements is an obvious intervention, a more effective and sustainable policy would entail a greater focus on health (nutrition) education/awareness raising to increase the consumption of vitamin C-rich food to help boost the rate of iron absorption.

Most Nauruan children are breastfed, and the mean duration of any breastfeeding is 18.6 months. This is slightly short of the recommended 24 months. The mean duration of exclusive breastfeeding (3.3 months), however, falls well short of the recommended six months. Less than half of all breastfed children aged 6–23 months met the minimum IYCF requirements, which are based on number of breastfeeds and the variety of food groups that are consumed. It appears that the foods consumed in this age group may not be enough to ensure optimum health and development.

