

Food, Health and Inequality

Food and Nutrition



Contents

- **What are Health Inequalities**
- **What are the effects of Health Inequalities**
- **Food-related inequalities**
- **Why Some Children have More Food Related Ill Health**
- **What is Being Done About Inequalities?**
- **Getting the Best Start in Life: Pregnancy**
- **Getting the Best Start in Life: Babies & Childhood**



What Are Health Inequalities?

Health inequalities are differences in health across the population and between different groups in society, that are **systematic, unfair and avoidable**.

They are caused by the conditions in which we are born, live, work and grow. These conditions influence how we think, feel and act and can affect both our physical and mental health and well-being.

Definition taken from the [National Institute for Health and Care Excellence](#)



What Are the Effects of Health Inequalities?

When we don't have the things we need, like warm homes and a healthy balanced diet, it puts a strain on our bodies which can result in greater stress and poorer health.

To create a society where everybody can thrive, we need all of the right **building blocks** in place:

- stable jobs
- good pay
- quality housing
- good education.

To try and reduce inequalities between different areas in Wales, work is being done to identify our communities where **blocks are missing**. This is to make sure those at most risk have the best access to support.

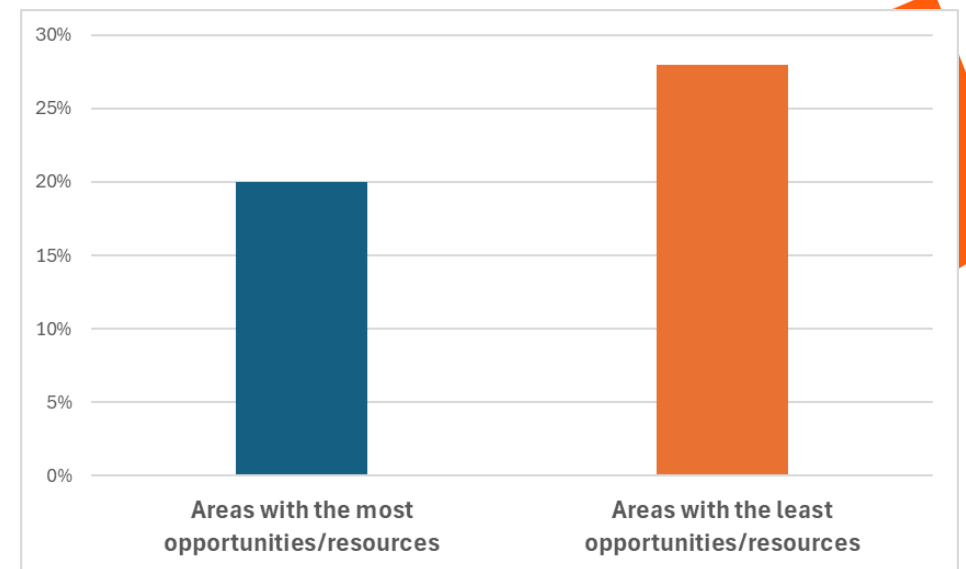
<https://urbanhealth.org.uk/our-work/childrens-health-and-food/framing-toolkit-talking-about-childhood-obesity>



Food-related inequalities

- Obesity and overweight are examples of food-related ill-health where there are inequalities.
- There are differences in the % of children living with overweight or obesity depending on where they live.
- Across Wales:
 - 20% of children who live in areas with access to **the most resources and opportunities live with overweight or obesity***, compared with
 - 28% of children who live in areas with access to the **fewest resources and opportunities live with overweight or obesity***.
- * This is measured by the **Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation** which combines information sources relating to people's living, working and education experiences.
- This is a difference of over 8%.
- Similar patterns can be seen across all the Health Board areas in Wales. Information on different Health Boards can be found [here](#).

Percentage of children with overweight or obesity, difference between areas with the most and least opportunities/resources in Wales, 2022/23



Source: Child Measurement Programme 2022/23

How our Environments Shape Children's Health in Wales

In Wales, not all children and young people have the same opportunities to enjoy good health, and some face more food-related health problems than others. These differences are unfair and can be reduced. Several factors shape children's chances of eating well and growing up healthy:

Income and Resources:

The cost and availability of food influence what families can choose. When families have more resources, they have more opportunities to buy healthier foods like fruit and vegetables. Families with fewer resources may face barriers that make it harder to access affordable, healthier options. These unequal conditions can have an impact on children's health.

Deprivation and Food Related Ill Health:

Children living in less advantaged areas often face more obstacles to achieving good health. For example, they may be more likely to experience tooth decay or have a less healthy weight. These health outcomes are shaped by the conditions in which children grow up, not by personal choices alone.

[Reframing how we talk about children's health and food - FrameWorks UK](#)

Environmental Factors:

The places where children live play a major role in shaping their health. Some neighbourhoods have good access to shops selling healthier food, safe green spaces and places to play. Others may have a higher concentration of fast-food outlets or fewer safe outdoor areas. Effective planning and fair access to local resources can help create healthier environments for every child.



What is being done about Health Inequalities?

Helping babies and children get the best start in life

Evidence suggests that during pregnancy and up to a child's second birthday can have a life-long impact on health and well-being. This is when babies and children start to become who they will be when they grow up.

Early experiences and the love and care babies receive shapes their development for life. A healthy balanced diet and reducing obesity/undernutrition during pregnancy helps babies and children to stay healthy later in life.

Babies' brains and bodies are built during pregnancy and the first years of life. Having a healthy balanced diet will support the growth and development of the baby during pregnancy and once born, helping them have the best start in life.



This short animation helps all of us think about the different roles needed to help families thrive and give babies the best start in life. <https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/the-first-1000-days-programme/>.

The Importance of food and nutrition during infancy & childhood

Food and nutrition are essential for getting the best start in life. Foods that make up a healthy balanced diet support:

- **Growth and Development:** through providing the essential nutrients needed for physical and cognitive development.
- **The Immune System:** by helping the body fight off infection and illness.
- **Brain Health:** by helping the brain develop, improving cognitive function, learning and memory.
- **Establishing Healthy Habits:** through helping children and young people to make healthier choices about food when they're older, preventing problems like obesity or becoming unwell with chronic diseases later in life, such as diabetes.

Giving babies and children the best start provides them with a strong foundation to grow, learn and develop.





GIG
CYMRU
NHS
WALES

Iechyd Cyhoeddus
Cymru
Public Health
Wales