

**Consultation on the Dietary Management of Moderate Malnutrition  
WHO, Geneva, 30 September to 3 October 2008**

**SCOPE AND PURPOSE**

**Background**

Moderate malnutrition (MM) is defined as a weight-for-age between -3 and -2 z-scores below the median of the WHO child growth standards. It can be due to a low weight-for-height (wasting) or a low height-for-age (stunting) or to a combination of both. Similarly, moderate wasting and stunting are defined as a weight-for-height and height-for-age, respectively, between -3 and -2 z-scores.

MM affects many children in poor countries. Children with MM have an increased risk of mortality and MM is associated with a high number of nutrition-related deaths. If not adequately treated, some children with MM may progress towards severe acute malnutrition (severe wasting and/or oedema) or severe stunting (height-for-age less than -3 z-scores), which are both life threatening conditions. Therefore, the management of MM should be a public health priority.

In contrast to severe malnutrition, programmes for the management of MM in children have remained virtually unchanged for the past 30 years -- although it seems likely that this form of malnutrition is associated with an even larger proportion of nutrition-related deaths -- and it seems timely to review efforts to improve their efficacy and effectiveness.

**Scope**

The overall aim of the meeting is to answer the question: "What diets should be recommended to feed moderately malnourished children?" The meeting will:

- discuss the nutritional requirements of moderately malnourished children (stunted and/or moderately wasted);
- review the diets that are currently being recommended in dietary counselling of moderately malnourished children and the food supplements that are being given as part of programmes targeting this group;
- examine whether the diets recommended and the food supplements given provide all nutrients needed for the recovery of the children;
- make recommendations on how the currently recommended diets and food supplements given to moderately malnourished children, if inadequate, may be reformulated to improve their efficacy to promote growth;
- discuss blanket or targeted approaches in the management of moderate malnutrition;
- identify knowledge gaps and research priorities to improve the management of moderately malnourished children, including questions of how to deliver the recommended diets and food supplements through effective programming.

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## **Objectives**

### ***General Objectives:***

1. To identify areas of consensus on the nutrient needs and dietary management of MM in children that can be translated into evidence-based global guidelines.
2. To identify knowledge gaps that should be addressed by research, both in the area of dietary management and the modalities for providing that diet.

### ***Specific objectives:***

1. To provide an estimate of nutritional requirements of children with MM (defined by a weight-for-age less than -2 z-scores). These nutritional requirements will be examined separately for children who are moderately wasted and those who are stunted.
2. To examine if current approaches for MM management, based either on dietary counseling or on the provision of food supplements, provide all nutrients needed for the recovery of children with MM.
3. To formulate recommendations to improve the dietary management of MM, either through dietary counseling or food supplementation.

In each of these areas, if the evidence base is not strong enough to formulate recommendations, the meeting should recommend which type of research is needed to address current knowledge gaps.

## **Expected outcome**

### ***1. Recommendations for the management of moderate malnutrition***

WHO will disseminate the proceeding of the meeting among relevant stakeholders. This will start the process for the development of preliminary recommendations for the dietary management of MM. The meeting should also produce a detailed research agenda to generate the evidence needed to strengthen these preliminary guidelines.

### ***2. Formulation of recommendations for feeding moderately malnourished children for the Codex Alimentarius working group developing standards of food products for underweight children***

The main conclusion of this meeting will be presented to the session of the *Codex Alimentarius* to be held in South Africa in November 2008. The meeting report should be used as a background document for the preparation of a new standard to be developed for underweight children or for adapting current standards.