

# To fix climate change, fix the obesity and starvation epidemics, reports say

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**Why climate change worries Coca-Cola, Apple and Nike** 02:11

**(CNN)**The world needs to come up with solutions to fight three interrelated pandemics -- obesity, starvation and climate change -- and it needs to do it fast before the planet is "burning," according to a report released Sunday in the Lancet.

The Lancet Commission, a group of 43 experts from 14 countries with a broad range of expertise recruited by the journal, has tackled the topic with high-profile reports [in 2011](#) and [2015](#), but "little progress has been made" other than acknowledging the epidemic, the authors of the newest report argue; in fact, the problem is [getting worse](#).

Around the world, not one country has reversed its obesity epidemic, and often, powerful companies driven by profit influence policy that is "at odds with the public good and planetary health," the report says. It's a problem that has become what the authors call a global syndemic.

A syndemic is "a synergy of pandemics that co-occur," interact and share common causes. These three pandemics represent the "paramount challenge for humans, the environment and our planet."

Together, obesity and malnutrition are the biggest cause of premature death. Globally, more than 2 billion adults and children are overweight or obese and have health problems because of it, [research shows](#). People don't or can't exercise, and that's the fourth leading risk factor [for death](#).

Simultaneously, the opposite problem exists. In 2017, world hunger increased for the third consecutive year, [UN research shows](#). Two billion struggle with micronutrient deficiencies, and 815 million are chronically undernourished, the report says.

As global temperatures rise even faster than predicted, climate change could lead to many more deaths than the 250,000 a year the [World Health Organization](#) predicted just five years ago. Because of [food shortages alone](#), the world could see a net increase of 529,000 adult deaths by 2050, according to [research](#).

Governments, companies and activists should tackle these obesity and undernutrition issues while tackling climate change. Each problem is related, and each, in large part, happens because of "misplaced economic incentives," "powerful vested interests," "policy inertia" and "insufficient" demand for change from the public. Solutions that help one could help the other. For example, if governments invest more in public transportation, that will make it more convenient and affordable for people to get to jobs that put food on the table. Those who drive less and take public transportation more often get more exercise and, [studies show](#), tend not to be obese. If fewer people drove cars, there would also be less greenhouse gas to contribute to climate change.

The report's other recommendations include reducing government subsidies for beef, dairy, sugar, corn, rice and wheat and redirecting that money to sustainable farming for healthier foods. Strengthening laws that increase

transparency would let people see how much money politicians get from large food conglomerates to perpetuate unhealthy policies. Another suggestion: providing clear nutrition labels on products and adding labels to explain how sustainable a food is, including how much water and carbon it took to make it. Also, the authors recommend investing \$70 billion over 10 years in a global "Food Fund" to reduce undernutrition.

The authors also say philanthropists should invest an additional \$1 billion to boost social advocacy to demand solutions to these syndemics.

These syndemics "need to be tackled, and they have not been tackled, and this is a core concern," said report co-author Tim Lobstein, policy director at the [World Obesity Federation](#).

The authors say businesses could help lead the way, such as by investing more in sustainable energy. Such investment reduces the pollution that causes climate change and makes the air easier to breathe, meaning people can exercise outside more.

"The Lancet Commission Report may just contain the right ingredients needed for a nutritionally challenged world," said Katie Dain, CEO of the [Non Communicable Diseases Alliance](#) global partnership, who was not involved in the report. "For too long, we have been daydreaming our way to a diseased future, one that is totally avoidable. The report's interconnected message on nutrition and climate change is clear: A food system that secures a better diet for this and the immediate next generations will save millions of lives and, at the same time, also help save the planet."

The authors hope the new report will start a conversation that creates alliances to push for better policies and encourage companies to create affordable products that would improve, rather than take away from, people's health.

What we have now is "unsustainable, and we must act," said report co-author [William H. Dietz](#), director of the Sumner M. Redstone Global Center for Prevention and Wellness and a professor at George Washington University. Otherwise, the planet could be "burning" within 50 years.

[Corinna Hawkes](#), a professor at City University London who worked on the report, notes, "No question it is highly aspirational, given today's world."

But Dietz added that urgent solutions are necessary. "We are running out of time."

## Take on food industry to beat malnutrition and obesity, says report

**Experts call for influence of 'big food' to be curbed to also tackle issue of climate change**

**Sarah Boseley** *Health editor*

Sun 27 Jan 2019 23.30 GMT

The experts also said there would be significant benefits for the planet if people ate less red meat. Photograph: Eric Gaillard/Reuters

The influence of "big food" must be curbed around the world if obesity, malnutrition and climate change are to be effectively tackled, according to a report.

Overconsumption of junk food and not having enough to eat are two sides of the malnutrition coin, said a **commission of experts** brought together by the Lancet medical journal. A third major global problem is interlinked – climate change that is worsened by food production, waste and transportation.

The commission said political leaders and civil society must step up to counter the commercial interests and lobbying of the food industry. It called for a UN treaty along the lines of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control to support countries in drawing up sustainable and healthy food policies. As the FCTC does with the tobacco industry, the proposed treaty would ban food and drink companies from discussions.

The commission also recommended removing **subsidies for agriculture** and transport that contribute to poor diet and health. It proposed a \$1bn (£760m) fund for civil society organisations that want to take on the food industry and press

for sugar taxes and other measures to improve diets and counter obesity.

The experts cited the work of the Mexican NGO El Poder Del Consumidor, which successfully fought for **taxes on soft drinks**, funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies.

The food and drink industry has enormous power and the money to exert pressure on governments, said Tim Lobstein of the World **Obesity** Federation, one of the commissioners. In the US Congress, he pointed out, there are 294 lobbyists from food and drink companies, more than from either the tobacco or alcohol industries.

“Of that, two-thirds are former Congress staff, so they know what they are doing. That level of lobbying is devoted to preserving the status quo. It is a major barrier to change and must be challenged,” he said.

In the US and Australia, food industry pressure succeeded in keeping sustainability out of national dietary guidelines, the commission said. In the US, **subsidies for fossil fuels** keep petrol prices artificially low, encouraging car use rather than cycling, walking or taking public transport.

No country has succeeded in reversing its obesity epidemic, said the experts, who argued a broader attack is needed.

Prof Boyd Swinburn of the University of Auckland, the co-chair of the commission, said: “Until now, undernutrition and obesity have been seen as polar opposites of either too few or too many calories.

“In reality, they are both driven by the same unhealthy, inequitable food systems, underpinned by the same political economy that is single-focused on economic growth and ignores the negative health and equity outcomes.

“Climate change has the same story of profits and power ignoring the environmental damage caused by current food systems, transportation, urban design and land use.”

Echoing the “**planetary health diet**” devised by a commission convened by the Lancet and the Eat Forum NGO, the obesity commission said there could be extensive benefits to the planet if people ate **less red meat**.

As an example of the interconnection of obesity, malnutrition and climate change, the experts said reducing red meat consumption through taxes, redirected subsidies, health and environmental labelling, and social marketing would lead to healthier diets, prevention of cancer and obesity, more land for efficient, sustainable agriculture, opportunities to reduce undernutrition, and lower **greenhouse gas emissions** from agriculture.

Sustainable food production is rising, said Lobstein. Changing the practices of large food companies, however, will not happen quickly.

Making the industry pay for plastic pollution could be one way to bring about change. From a survey by Ocean Conservancy, he calculated that 70% of the 10 most common types of plastic waste in seas is from food and drink. **Food**wrappers, plastic bottles, bottle tops and grocery bags are in the top five items found, after cigarette butts.

“All these things are interrelated,” Lobstein said. “There are compounds in plastics that are endocrine disruptors, which may be contributing to obesity. If plastics in the food chain are causing weight gain, we will need win-win solutions to improve the food supply while saving the planet.”

Fiona Sing of the World Cancer Research Fund said: “We support the implementation of a global treaty to limit the political influence of big food. How we produce and consume food is possibly the most important determinant of both human and environmental health worldwide.

“Obesity and undernutrition affect billions of people and are major drivers in diet-related non-communicable diseases, including cancer.”