

Title: "A Life Course Approach to Health and Well-being"

Understanding Influences and Interventions Across the Lifespan



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Student ID Number:

Module: Living well: A Life course approach to Health & Wellbeing – Swansea

Module Code (BMNS4014)

Date of Submission:

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- The life course approach studies factors that shape a person's health and well-being from birth to old age, challenging the old way of thinking of health as separate areas.
 - It is significant because it challenges the primary focus on emergency care and points to the need for complete strategies that help prevent illnesses and improve health over the years.
 - The presentation will critically analyse how early life, personal choices, and the environment affect health, how health changes with each stage of life, and the success of today's health policies.
 - The structure involves outlining the life course approach, studying significant influences (from childhood, lifestyle, and social factors), examining health in various life phases, assessing health interventions, and recommending actions to solve the main problems in health promotion.

- According to Zuber *et al.* (2023), the life course approach studies how biological, social, and environmental factors affect health throughout a person's life, pointing out why models that focus on short-term health are insufficient.
- It highlights that the earliest years of life are especially significant, as actions taken during this time can significantly affect a person's health, making it unclear why more effort is not given to preventive care (World Health Organisation, 2023).
- By repeating, risks such as poverty can result in bigger health issues, so it is crucial to have policies considering the whole lifespan. For example, the shift from adolescence to adulthood can expose problems in health systems as habits learned in adolescence continue, pointing out that there are not enough targeted interventions during this change (Hargreaves *et al.*, 2022).
- It is crucial because it points out problems in healthcare and supports taking action to prevent more chronic diseases, which cost the UK residents a significant amount of money every year (Dunn *et al.*, 2023).

UK health care spending over time

Annual and 5-year average, real terms (1954/55-2024/25)

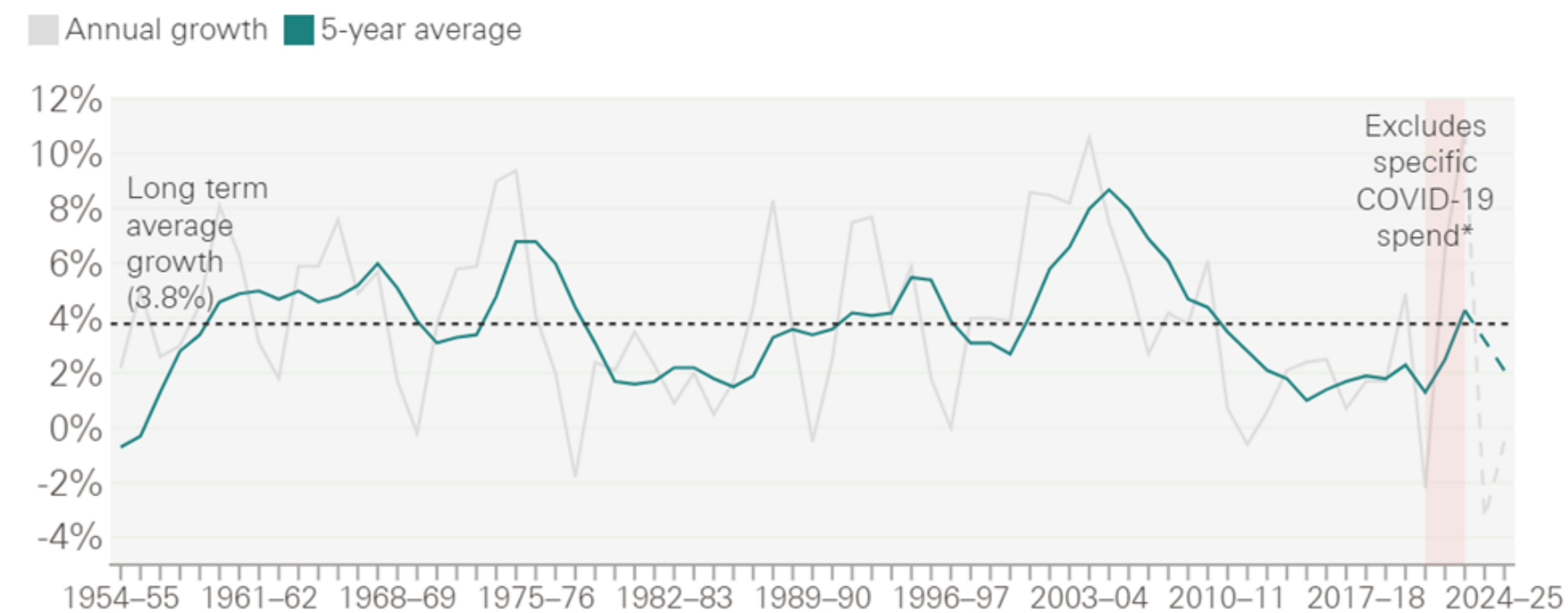


Figure 1: UK health care spending over time, Annual and 5-year average, real terms (1954/55-2024/25) (Source: Dunn *et al.*, 2023)

- Experiences from birth, such as good nutrition for the mother and baby, play a key role in a person's health and show that solving health disparities depends on early influences, not just what happens in adulthood (Bohren *et al.*, 2024).
- According to the study by Kerker *et al.* (2015), among young children (18-71 months) in the child welfare system, each additional adverse childhood experience, such as abuse, is associated with 21% increased odds of having a chronic medical condition.
- Prenatal stress in mothers prepares children for health risks and points out that underfunded maternal care programs do not consider the long-term health of kids (Clark *et al.*, 2023).
- Being deprived of resources as a child increases the risk of obesity later in life for children from low-income families, making the system less fair. As a result, they urge for better early support by suggesting that policies should focus on the environment before and during childhood to reduce the £7.2 billion spending per year in the UK on preventable diseases (Government of the UK, 2022).



Figure 2: Stunted Growth and Development: Contexts, Causes, and Consequences (Source: Onyango *et al.*, 2020)

- Diet, exercise, and whether someone smokes are important lifestyle choices that significantly affect health, so short-term health campaigns that do not address such habits are insufficient (Landi *et al.*, 2025).
- In addition, obesity, mainly caused by unhealthy eating and not exercising, leads to a higher risk of heart disease, pointing out that not enough long-term actions are taken in poor communities (Valenzuela *et al.*, 2023).
- Approximately 8 million people die from smoking each year, which is why it is so hard for underfunded programs to help people who are at risk (World Health Organisation, 2024).
- Certain areas in the UK that lack resources are more likely to have obesity, suggesting that many people do not have equal access to health education. However, it is noted that the NHS spent £1 billion in 2023/2024 on lifestyle diseases and promotes ongoing actions to change habits and reduce health inequalities (NHS, 2025).

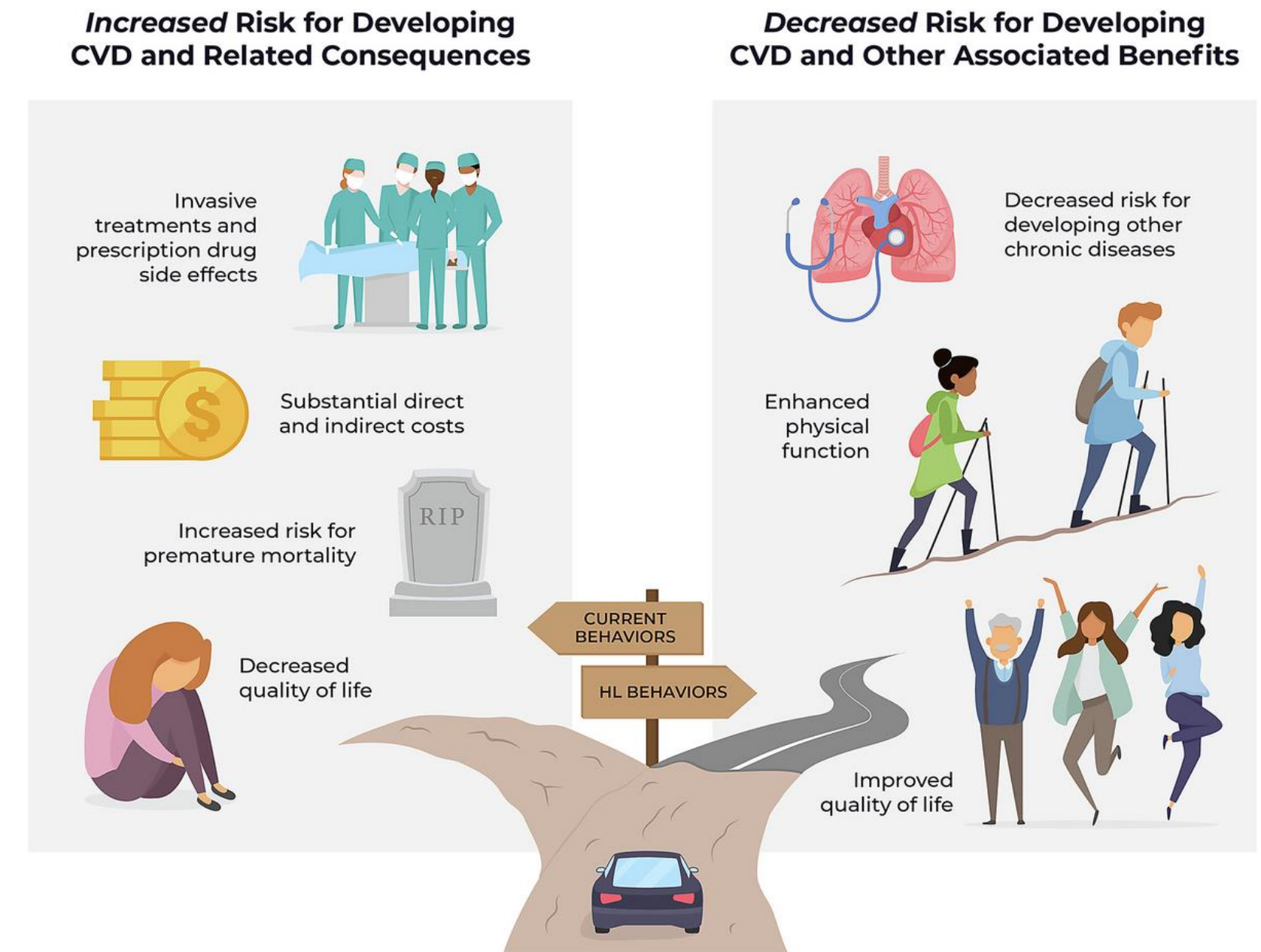


Figure 3: Behaviours in both the primary and secondary prevention settings (Source: Kaminsky *et al.*, 2022)

- Differences in health are mainly caused by social factors such as socioeconomic status, education, housing, and access to healthcare, showing that health systems are not addressing the main reasons for health inequality.
- Growing up in poverty raises the likelihood of contracting adult diseases, as a recent study showed that adults from deprived backgrounds are more than twice as likely to have diabetes (Huang *et al.*, 2023).
- Since marginalised communities have less access to healthcare, they miss out on preventive healthcare by 30%, which shows that policies that focus on curing diseases rather than prevention are not effective (World Health Organisation, 2024).
- If a home is overcrowded, it can lead to more cases of respiratory disease, which suggests that urban planning should be more aware of health issues (Eveleigh *et al.*, 2025).
- According to these findings, policies that combine education and housing reforms should address the lack of attention to social determinants and lessen the yearly cost of health inequities in the UK.



Figure 4: Development and sustainability interplay (Source: Cerf, 2023)

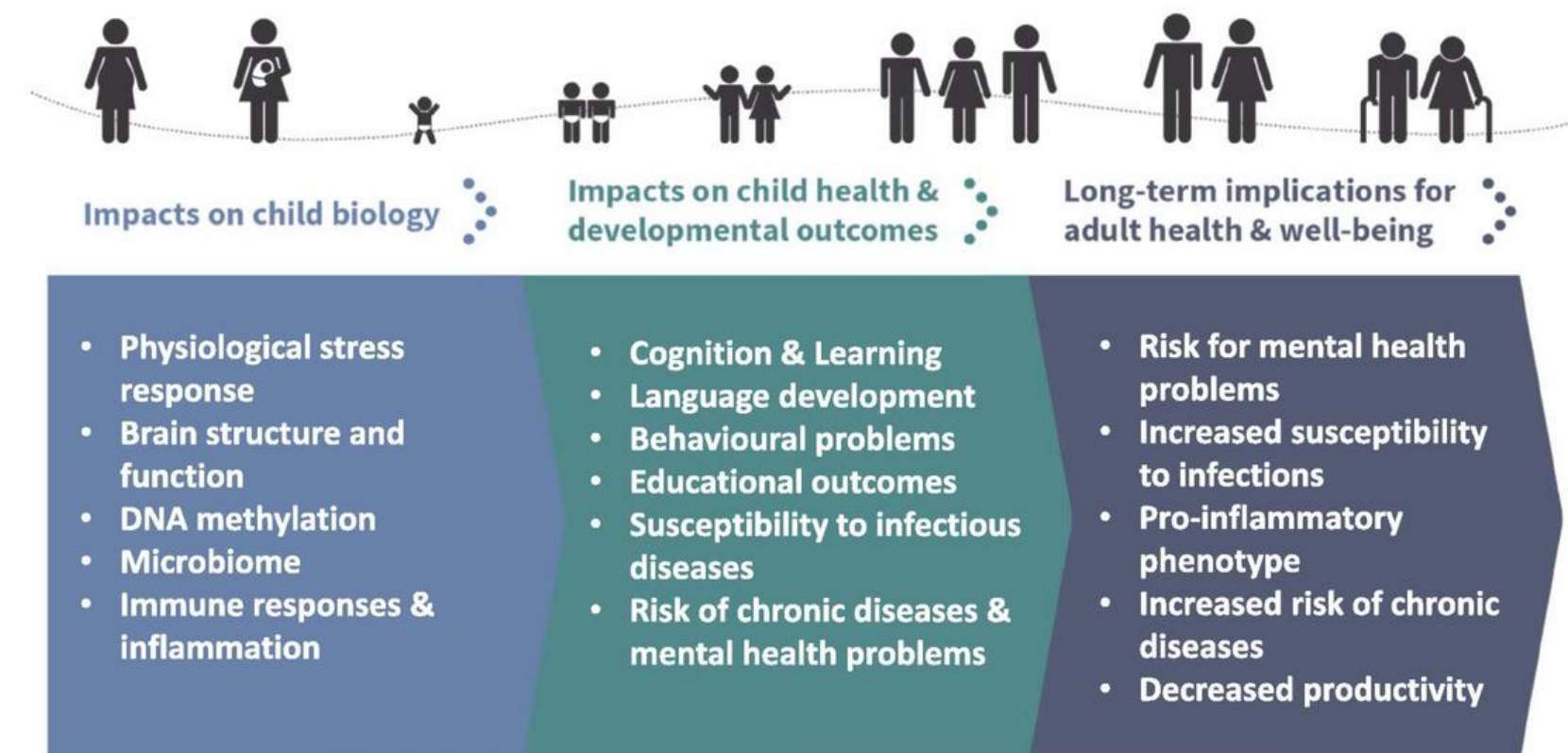


Figure 5: Association with Early Life Poverty (Source: Schmidt *et al.*, 2021)

- Children are most affected by their environment from birth to eighteen years. UNICEF (2024) reported that one in four children in low-income places experience stunted growth due to ineffective nutritional policies.
- During adulthood (19–64 years), many face difficulties from stress at work, which can lead to mental health problems, and this shows that occupational health programs need improvement (De Groot *et al.*, 2022).
- Health changes over the years and habits formed in adolescence can significantly raise the chances of being overweight as an adult, making short-term health initiatives less effective (Lister *et al.*, 2023).
- Changes between stages highlight problems in the system because more adolescents are becoming adults without the proper support, leading to higher rates of chronic diseases, and calling for better policies for each stage (Toulany *et al.*, 2022).
- To conclude, the studies express concern over divided health care structures and encourage the use of unified plans to address problems at every health stage and reduce long-term illnesses.

Severe child food poverty affects 1 in 4 children, globally

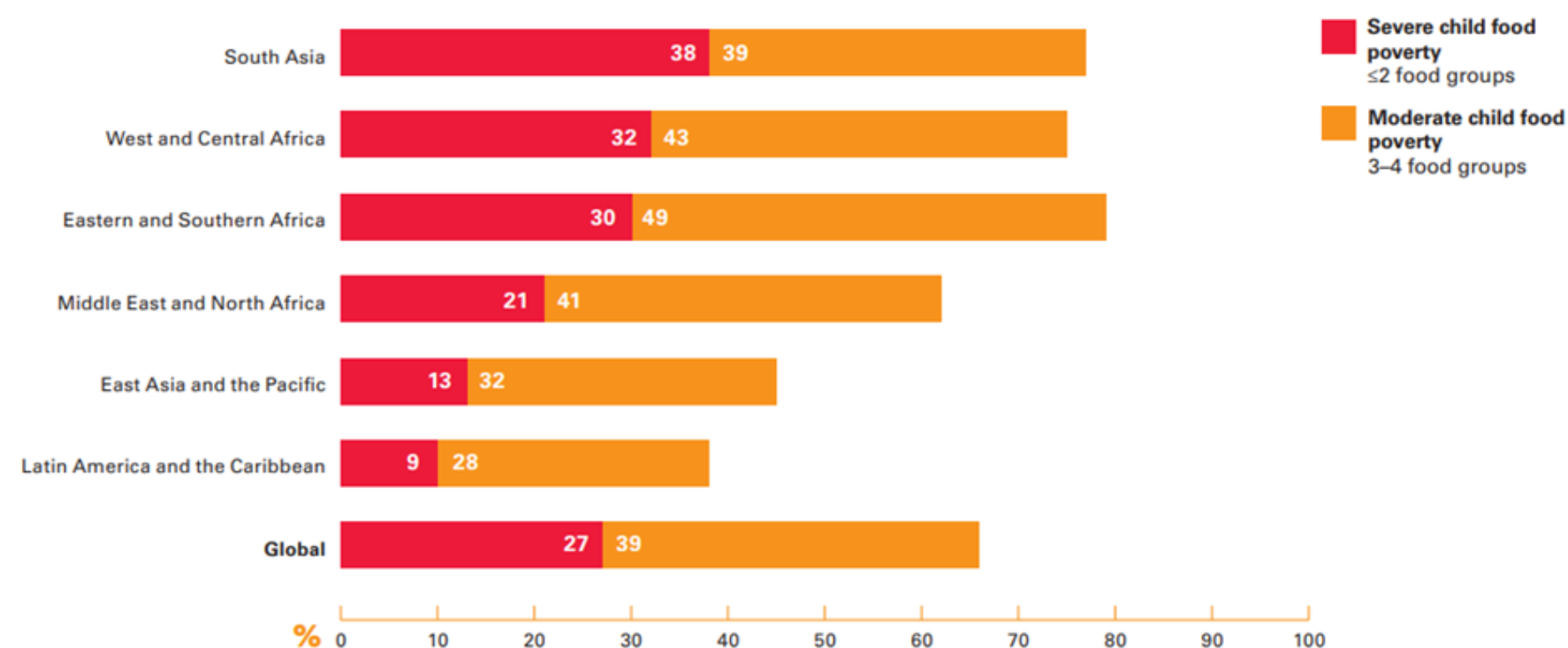


Figure 6: Percentage of children living in severe and moderate child food poverty, by UNICEF region and globally, 2022. (Source: UNICEF 2024)

- Most people over 65 in the UK suffer from multiple chronic illnesses, which highlights that there is not enough money spent on healthy ageing programs (McKee *et al.*, 2021).
- Early programs such as Sure Start can cut childhood obesity in the short run, but we do not yet know how effective they are over a long period (Mason *et al.*, 2021).
- Stopping smoking in adulthood reduces lung cancer risk, but not everyone can take part, which raises questions about fairness. Workouts for the elderly help people move more easily and decrease the risk of falling (Bilenduke *et al.*, 2023).
- However, limited funding prevents the programs from reaching everyone and challenges health officials. These results support a combined approach to helping with social issues and ensuring early schooling.

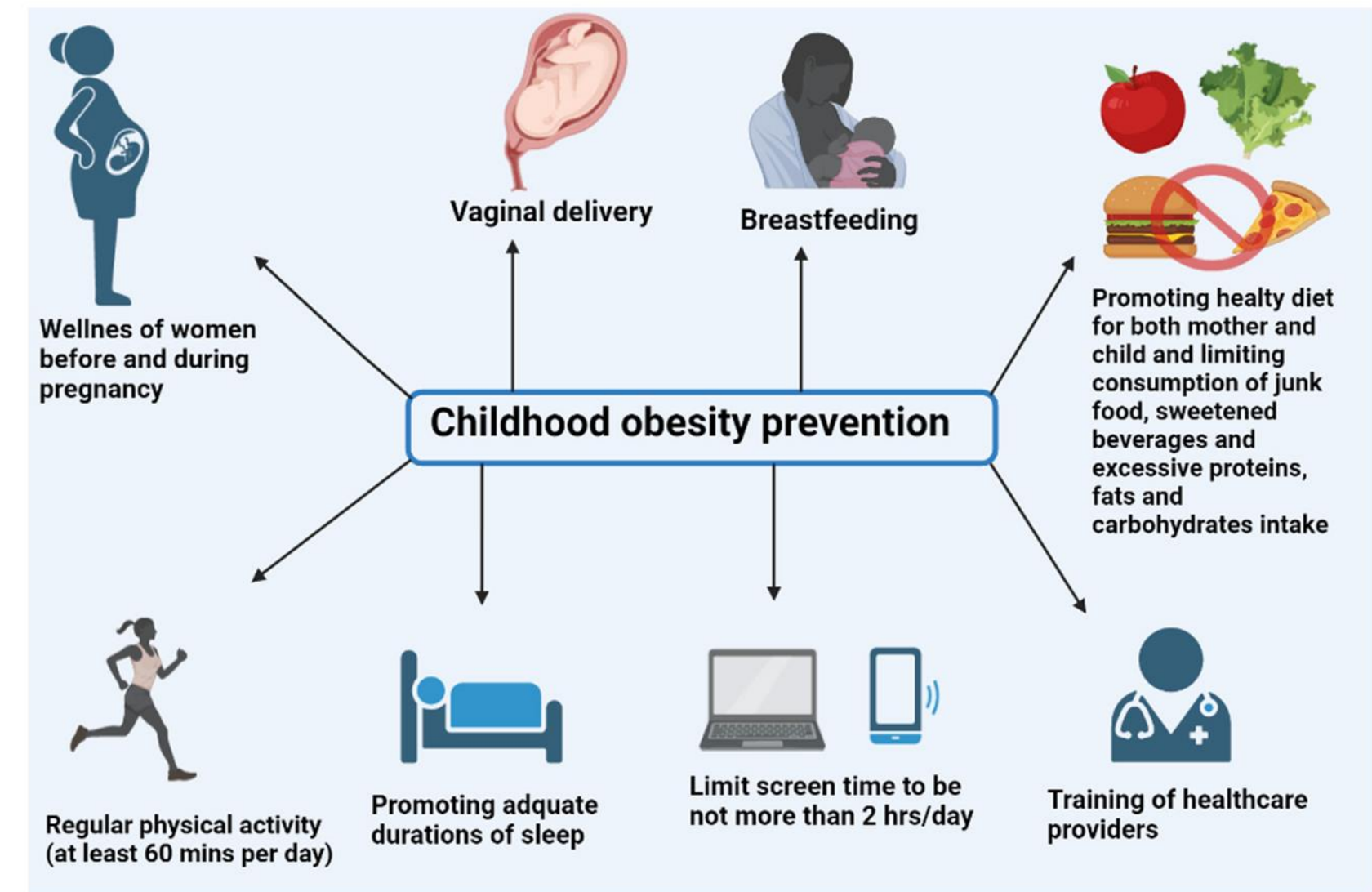


Figure 7: Childhood obesity prevention (Source: Shaban Mohamed et al., 2022)

- The course life approach clarifies that health outcomes are shaped by early life experiences, choices, and external factors, highlighting that separate health policies do not work well.
- It is clear from health changes across life that there are significant gaps and chronic diseases are linked to early life and social issues that challenge the current healthcare system's main priorities.
- To reduce the cost of chronic diseases in the UK, it is essential to use policies that consider the whole life cycle, as there is not enough investment in addressing social inequality.
- It is vital for integrated health strategies to start early and promote social changes, as the current situation leads to a higher death rate in underprivileged areas, indicating unfair resource distribution.
- The analysis proposes that we move to health systems that focus on equity and last a lifetime to reduce differences and improve people's overall well-being, which requires significant reforms.

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