

Food insecurity and dietary quality in London food bank clients

Prof Nathan Davies

UCL Division of Medicine



The plan

Conduct surveys with food bank clients in north London (Barnet/Camden) to determine dietary intake quality.

We wished to investigate:

- The nutritional quality of their diets
- The levels of food security

By repeating the survey over multiple years we could assess whether there was improvement or decline.



The methods

Students would approach clients and ask them if they were willing to fill out an anonymous survey.

Clients who agreed were asked to sign a consent form and given a shopping voucher as a gesture of appreciation.



Surveys used



Short-form food frequency questionnaire

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Household Food Security Score

Additional questions to determine ethnic background, background, living arrangements and use of food banks.

Data Collection

- Between 2022-2025 survey data was collected by MSc students during July.

- They visited

All Saints Church

St Barnabas Church

Chipping Barnet

Colindale

NW7 Hub

One Stonegrove

Euston

Siding Community Centre



Points to note

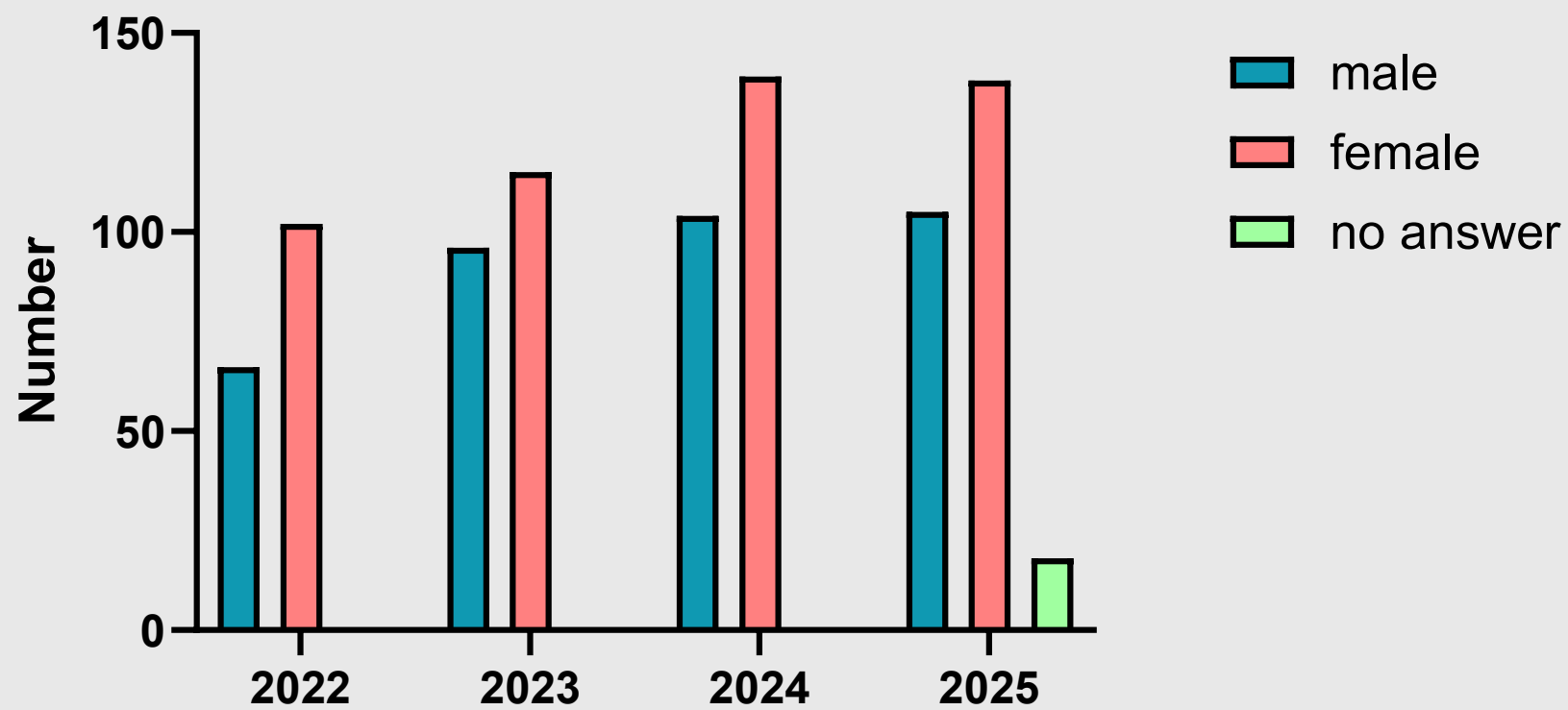
Data collection was conducted in July

As the data collection is anonymous, it is possible that individuals appear more than once

The surveys are not intended to be comprehensive, but give an indication of diet quality

We do not have a means to verify the information

Survey Respondents Gender



Reasons for Foodbank attendance

	2022	2023	2024	2025
Benefit Delays	17 (8.9%)	14 (5.6%)	29 (9.3%)	19 (7.8%)
Low-income	†89(46.8%)	†125(49.6%)	†156(50.2%)	146 (60.1%)
Benefit Changes	10 (5.3%)	15 (6.0%)	8 (2.6%)	8 (3.3%)
Debt	18 (9.5%)	23 (9.1%)	18 (5.8%)	7 (2.9%)
Delayed wages	2(1.1%)	1(0.4%)	3(1.0%)	0
Unemployment	†30(15.8%)	†50(19.8%)	†60(19.3%)	39 (16%)
Sickness	14 (7.4%)	21 (8.3%)	21 (6.8%)	14 (5.8%)
Homeless	10 (5.3%)	3 (1.2%)	16 (5.1%)	10 (4.1%)

Ethnic background

	2022	2023	2024	2025
Asian	36 (21.8%)	45 (21.8%)	67 (26.0%)	42 (17.2%)
Black	42 (25.5%)	36 (17.5%)	44 (17.1%)	49 (20.8%)
White	66 (40.0%)	85 (41.3%)	91 (35.3%)	86 (35.2%)
Mixed	15 (9.1%)	39 (18.9%)	50 (19.4%)	53 (21.7%)
Other	6 (3.6%)	1 (0.5%)	6 (2.3%)	14 (5.7%)

Voucher referral

	2022	2023	2024	2025
Job Centre	21 (20%)	40 (22%)	38 (20%)	43 (21.1%)
Children Centre	9 (9%)	14 (8%)	9 (5%)	8 (3.9%)
Citizen Advise Bureau	20 (19%)	24 (13%)	23 (12%)	17 (8.3%)
Local Church/ School	17 (16%)	37 (20%)	38 (12%)	40 (19.6%)
Doctor	3 (3%)	8 (4%)	15 (8%)	5 (2.45%)
Local Council	17 (16%)	36 (20%)	53 (28%)	71 (34.8%)
Support worker	18 (17%)	25 (14%)	13 (7%)	20 (9.8%)

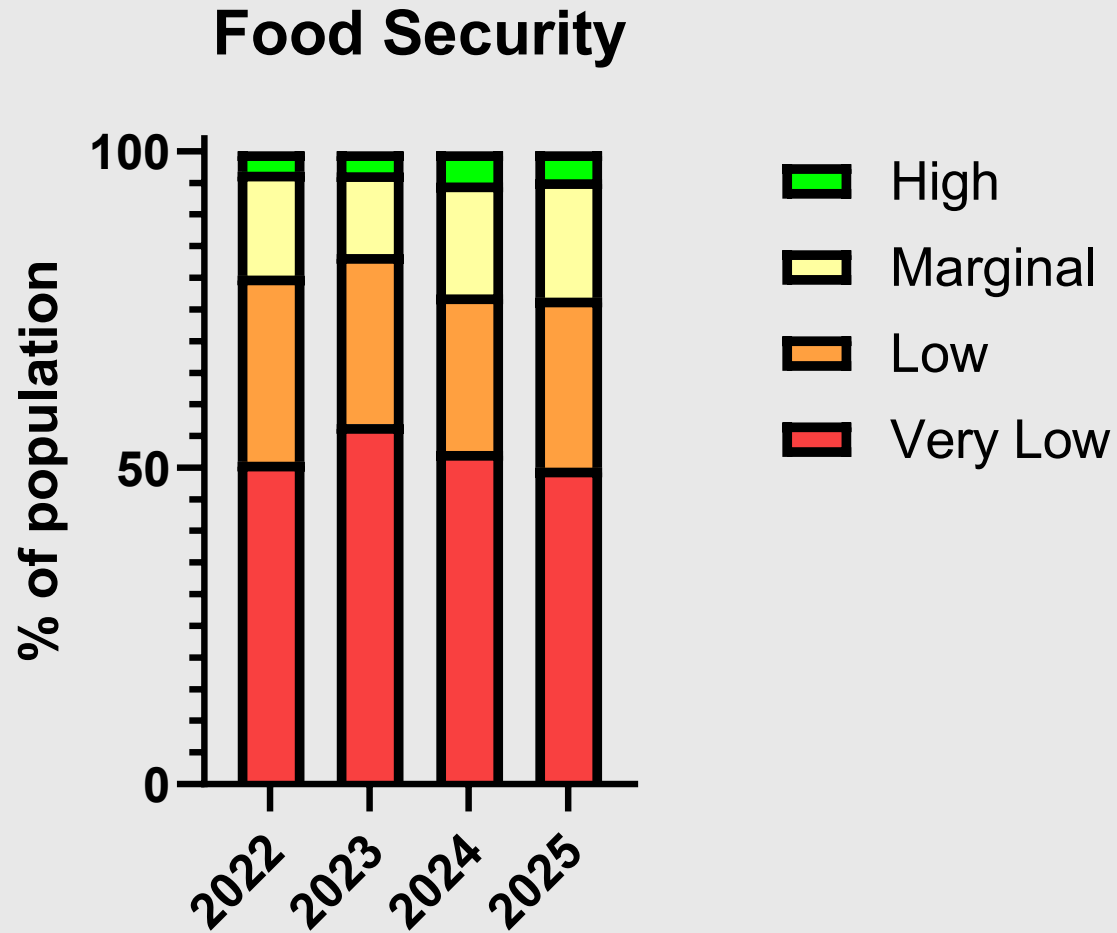
Marital Status

	2022	2023		2024	2025
Cohabiting	4 (2%)	6 (3%)		5 (2%)	5 (2%)
Divorced	26 (16%)	27 (13%)		23 (10%)	21(9%)
Married	40 (24%)	56 (28%)		81 (34%)	70(32%)
Partner	1 (1%)			1 (0%)	1(0%)
Separated	20 (12%)	17 (8%)		20 (8%)	18(8%)
Single	71 (43%)	89 (44%)		96 (40%)	97(44%)
Widowed	5 (3%)	8 (4%)		12 (5%)	10(5%)

Visits to food banks each week

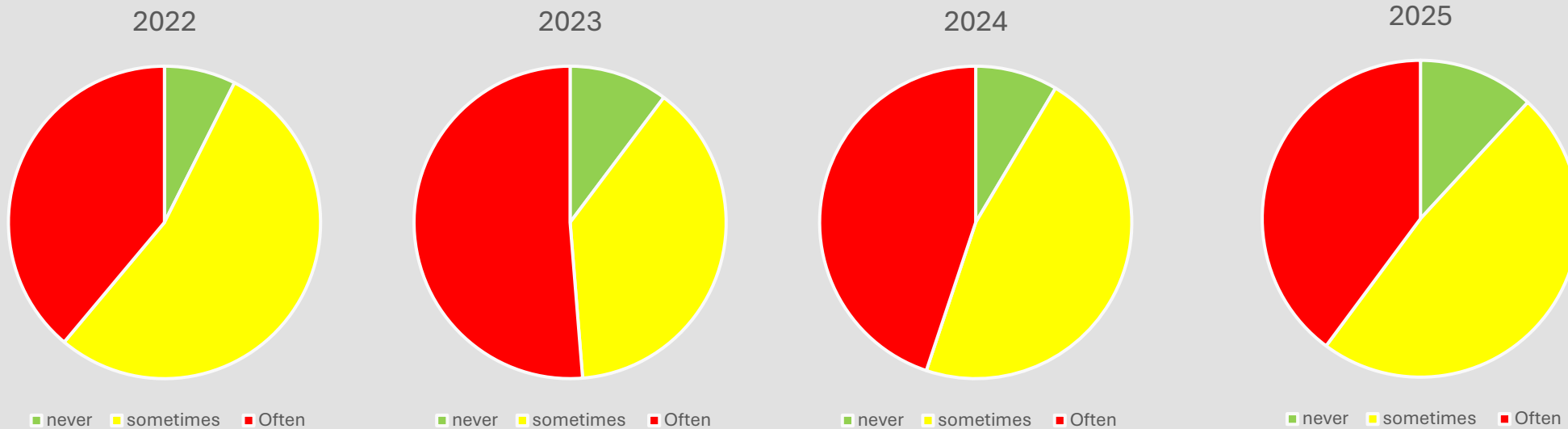
Food bank visit frequency	2022	2023	2024	2025
Less than 1 time per week	27	27	32	15
1 time per week	104	119	142	157
2 times per week	11	21	22	33
3 times per week	2	4	9	4
4 times per week	1	1	3	3
5 times per week	1	1	0	0
6 times per week	0	1	1	1
7 times per week	1	2	7	5

Food Security

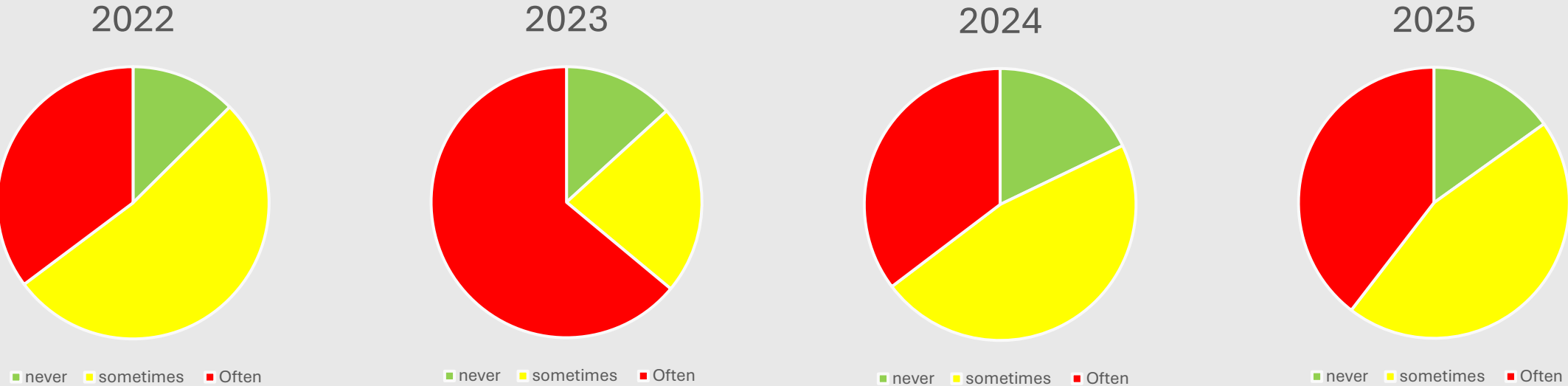


- **High food security** - Households had no problems
- **Marginal food security** – Households had problems at times
- **Low food security** - Households reduced the quality, variety, and desirability of their diets
- **Very low food security** - eating patterns of one or more household members were disrupted and food intake was reduced because the household lacked money and other resources for food

“I/We worried whether my/our food would run out before I/we got money to buy more.”



“I/we couldn’t afford to eat balanced meals.”



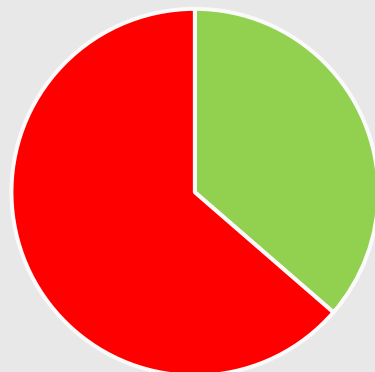
In the last 12 months, were you ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?

2022



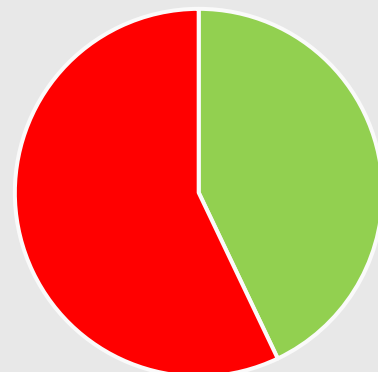
no yes

2023



no yes

2024



no yes

2025



no yes

In the last 12 months, did you/other adults in your household ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food?

2022



no yes

2023



no yes

2024



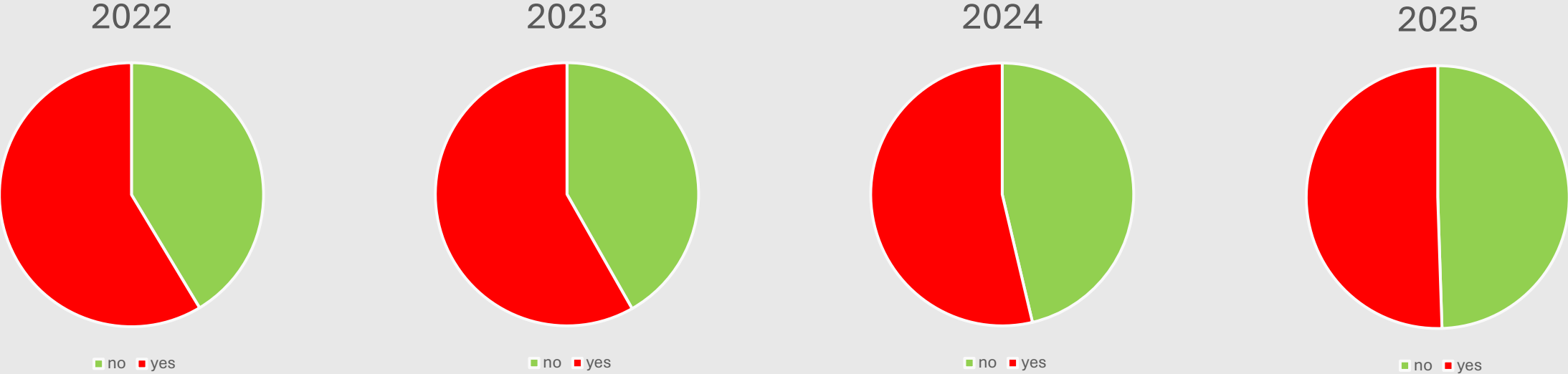
no yes

2025

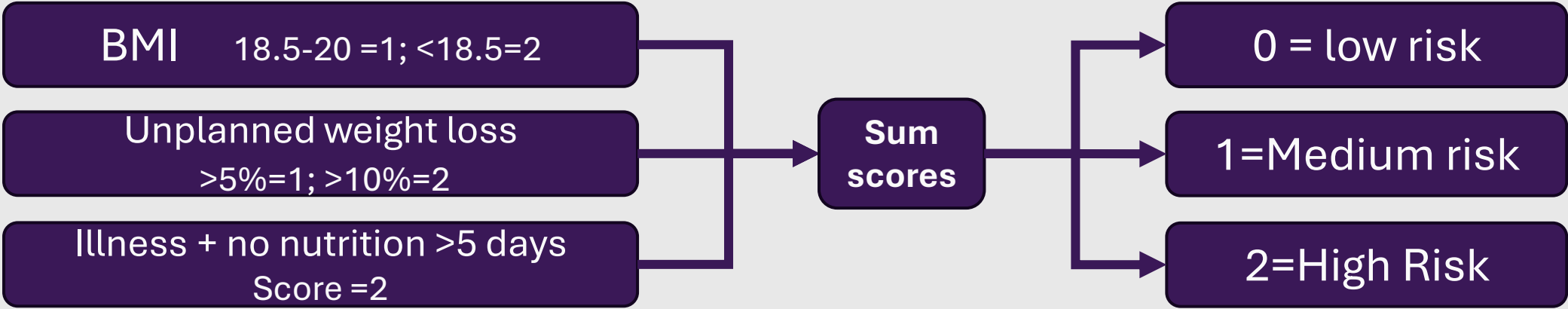


no yes

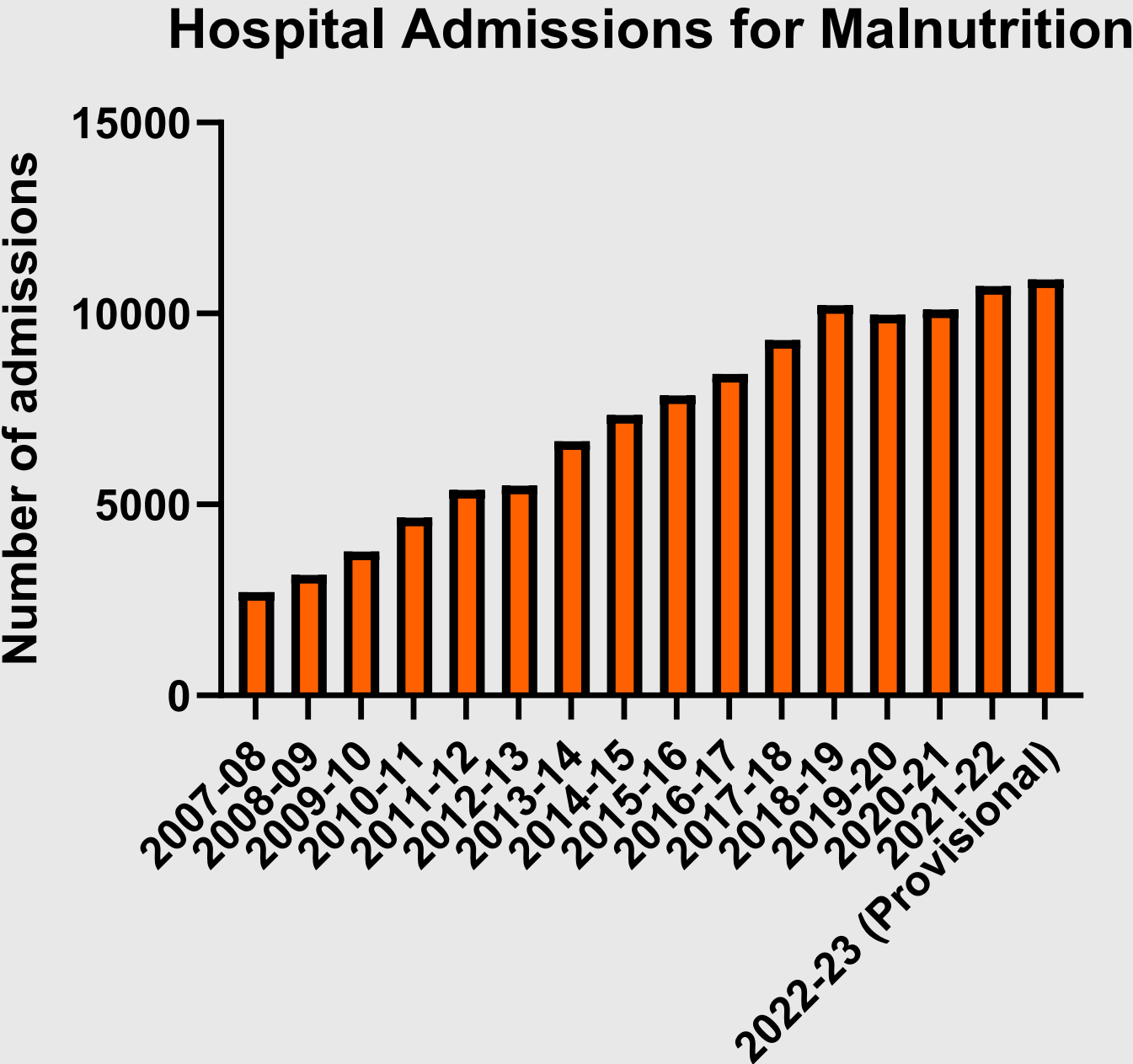
In the last 12 months, did you lose weight because there wasn't enough money for food?



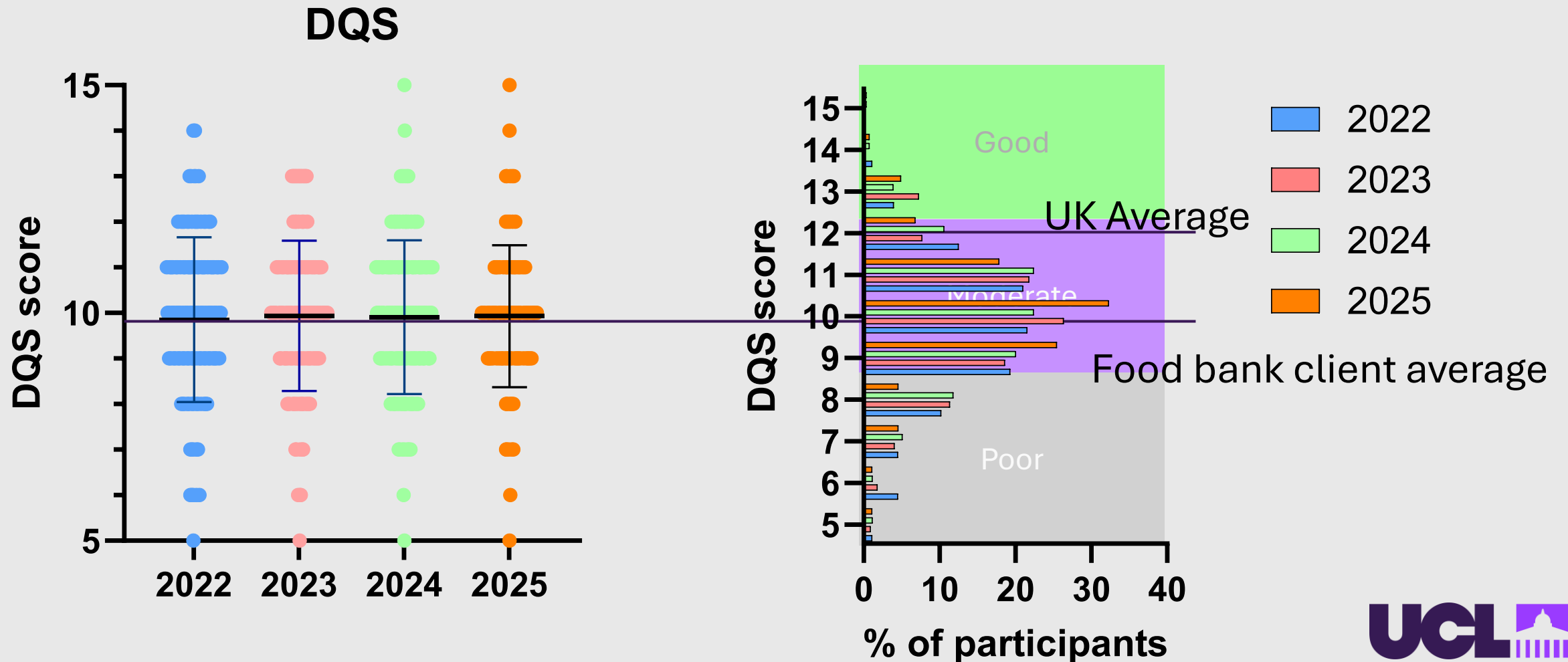
Malnutrition Universal Screening Tool



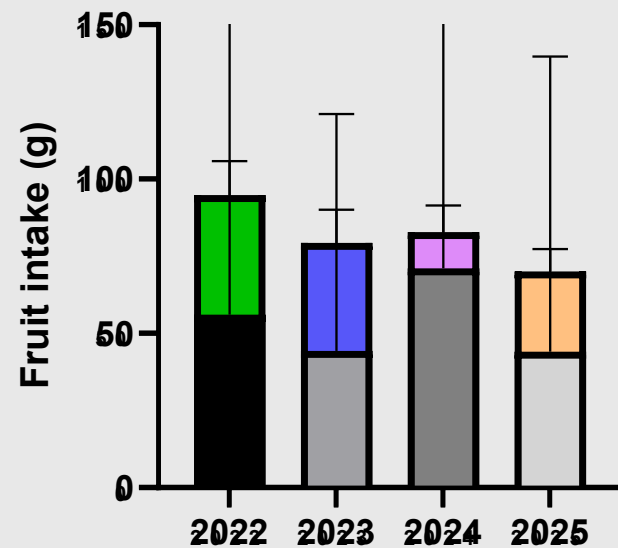
Malnutrition in the UK



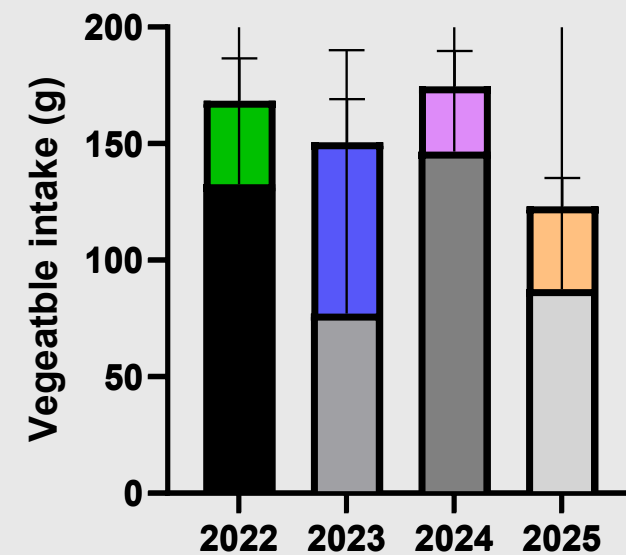
Dietary Quality Score



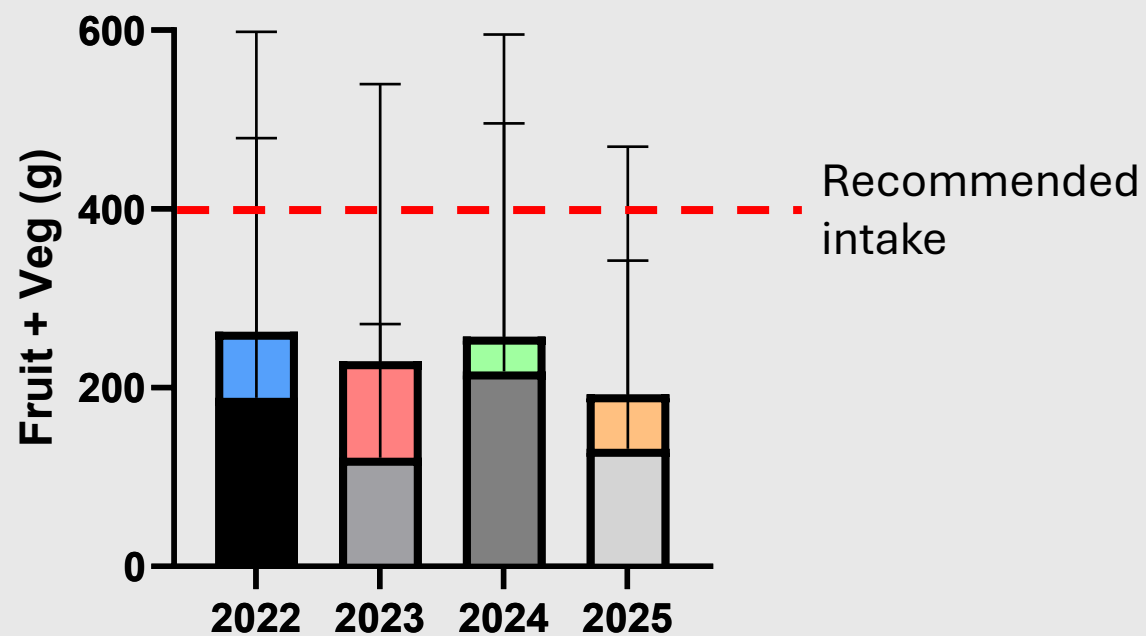
Fruit intake



Vegetable intake



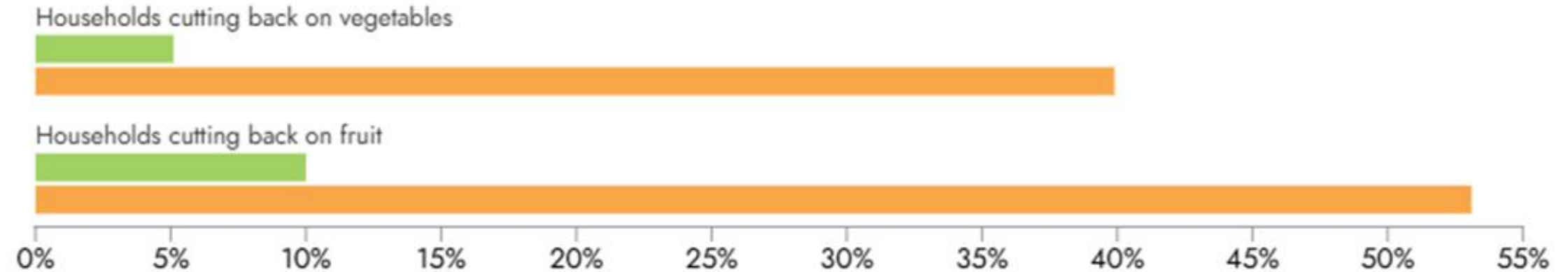
5-a-day



Half of food insecure families are cutting back on fruit

Percentage of households reporting cutting back on purchases:

■ Food secure ■ Food insecure

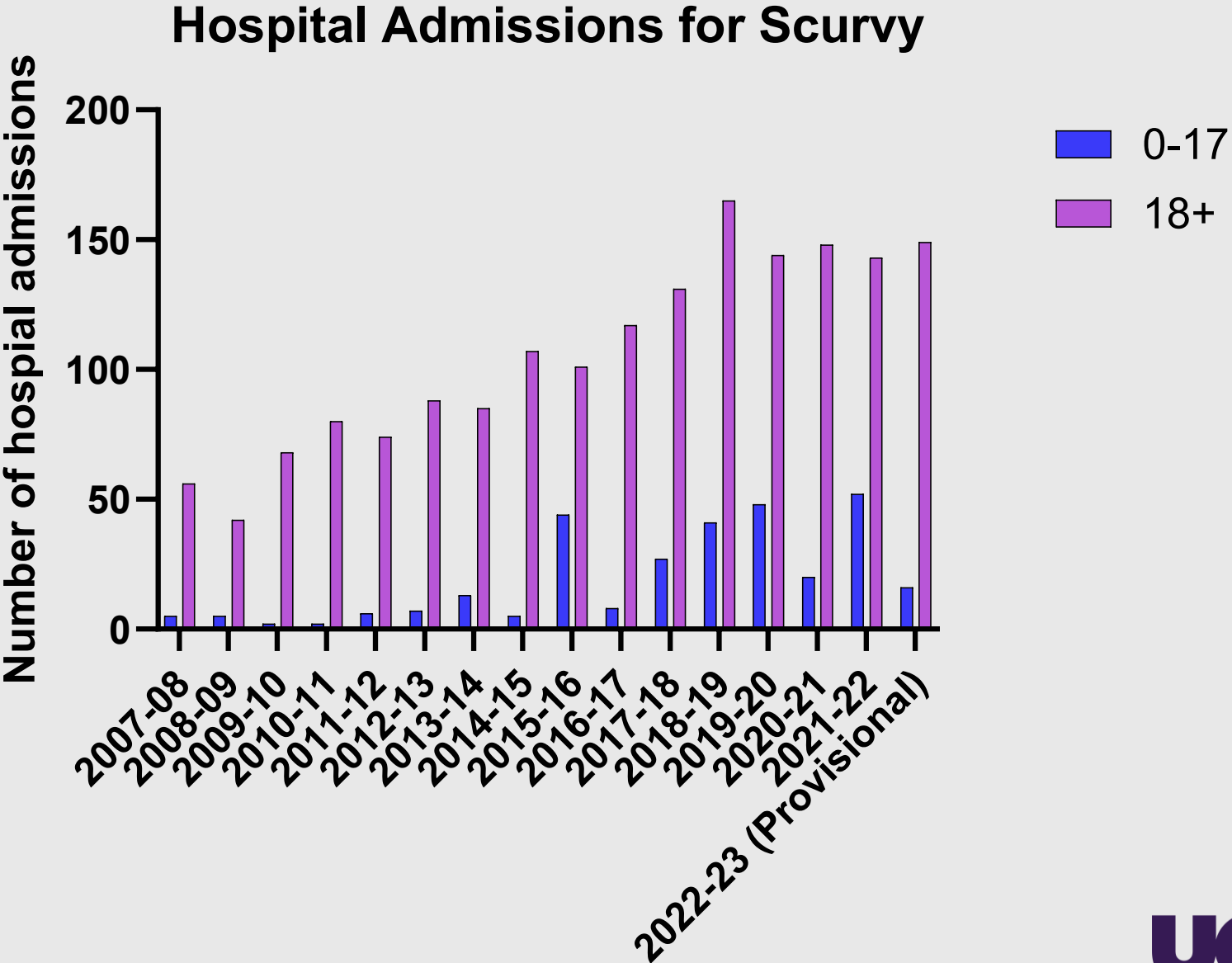


23rd January - 3rd February 2026



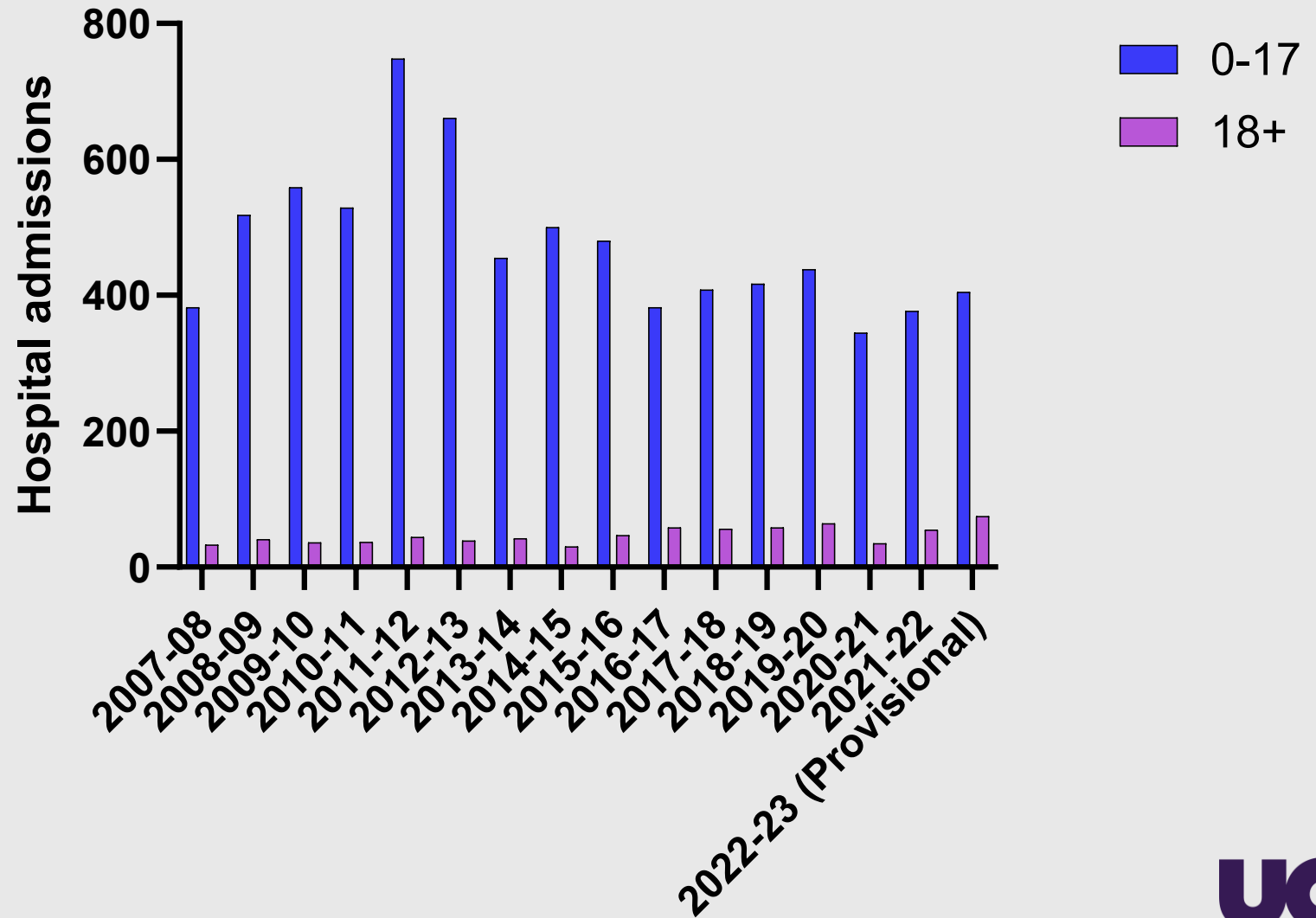
BMJ

BMJ Case Reports CP 2024;17:e261082.

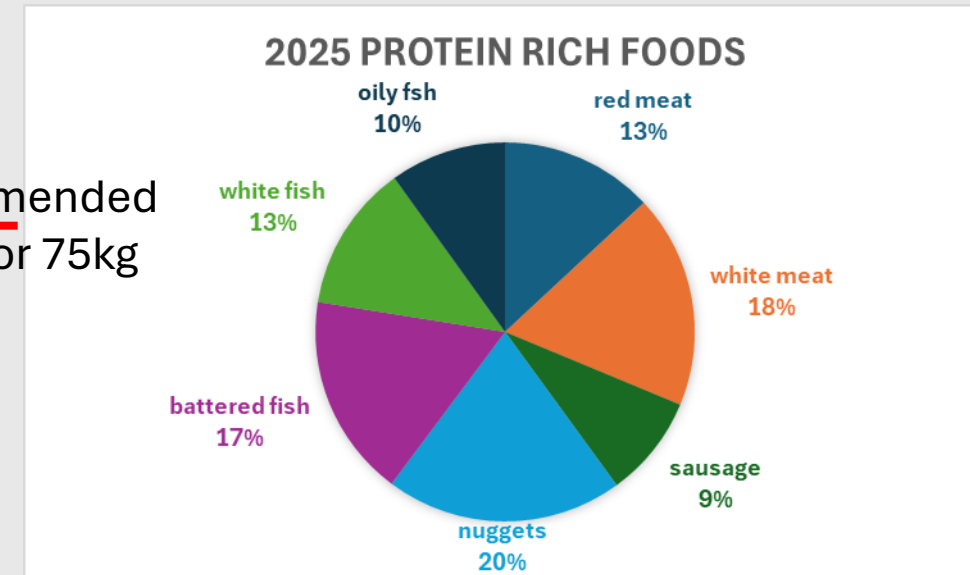
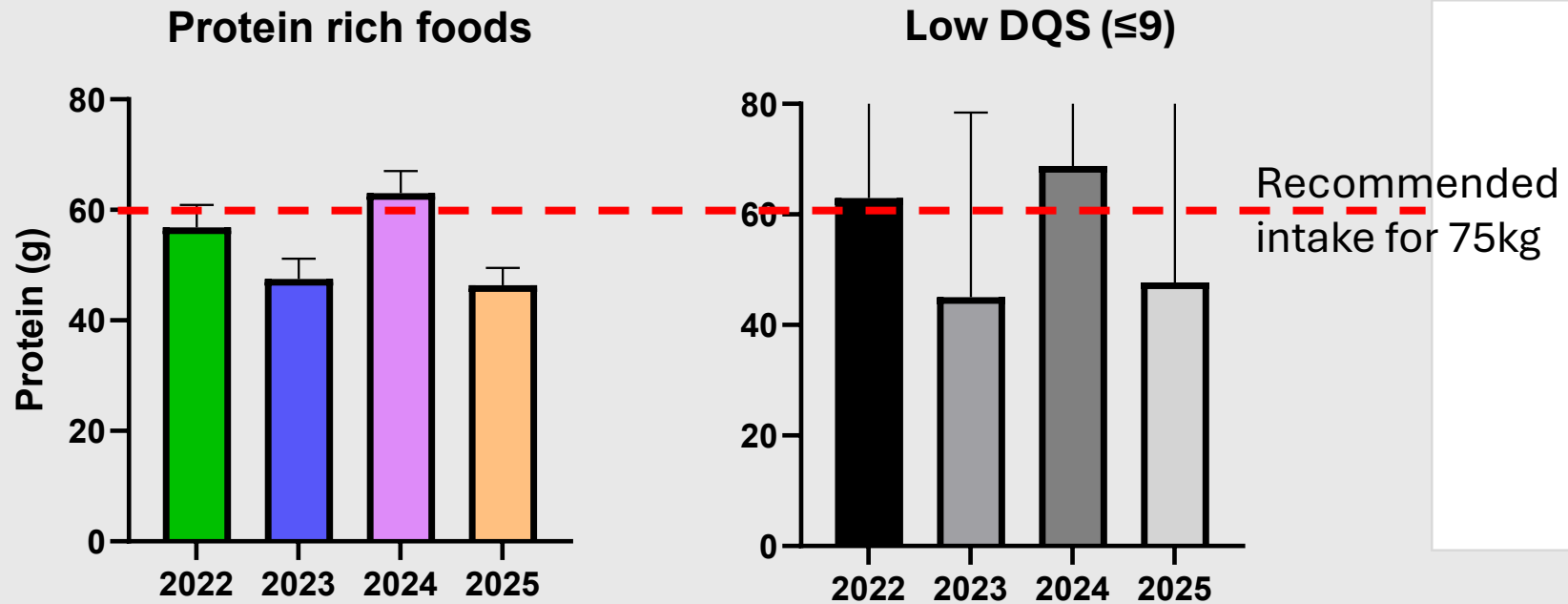




Hospital Admissions for Rickets

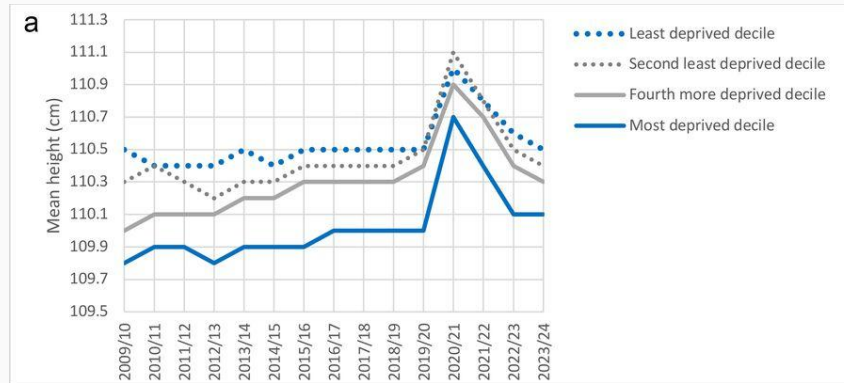


Estimated Protein Intake

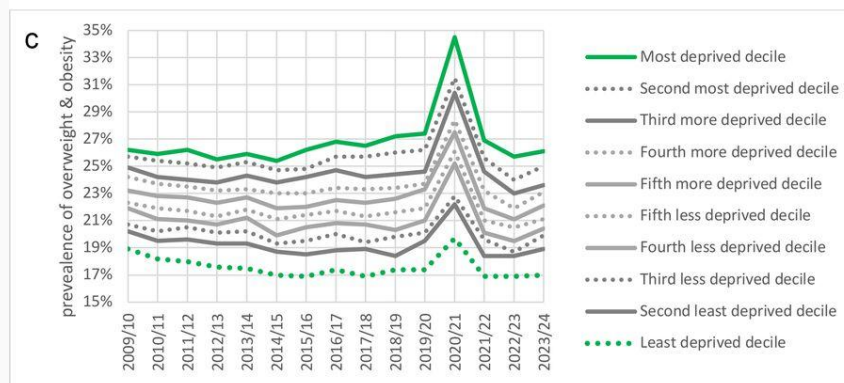
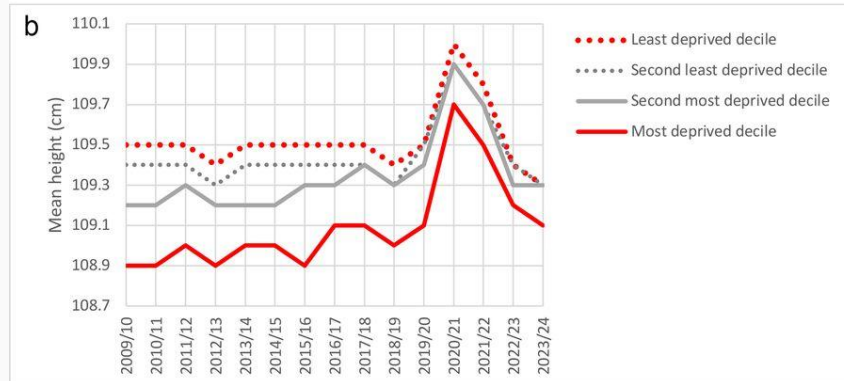


Boys Height

Age 5

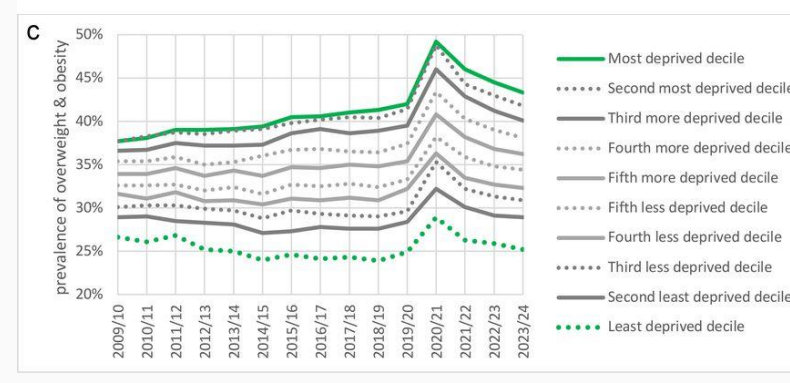
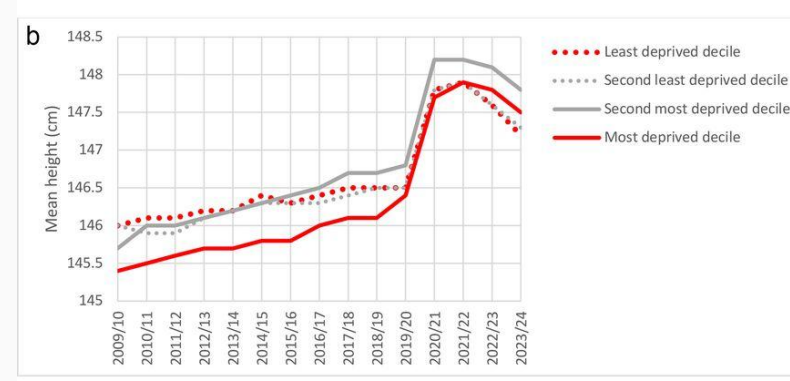
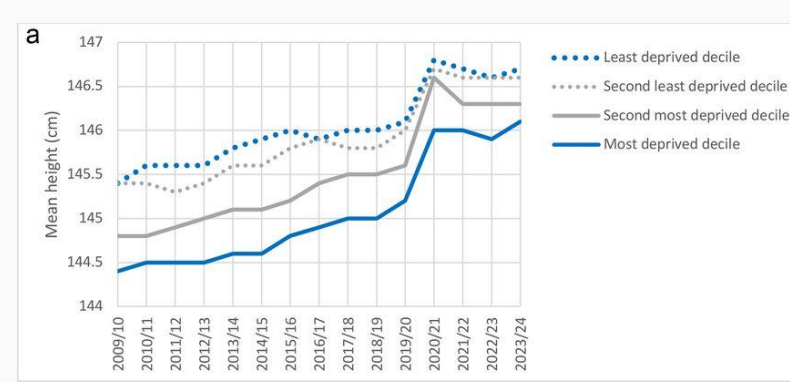


Girls Height

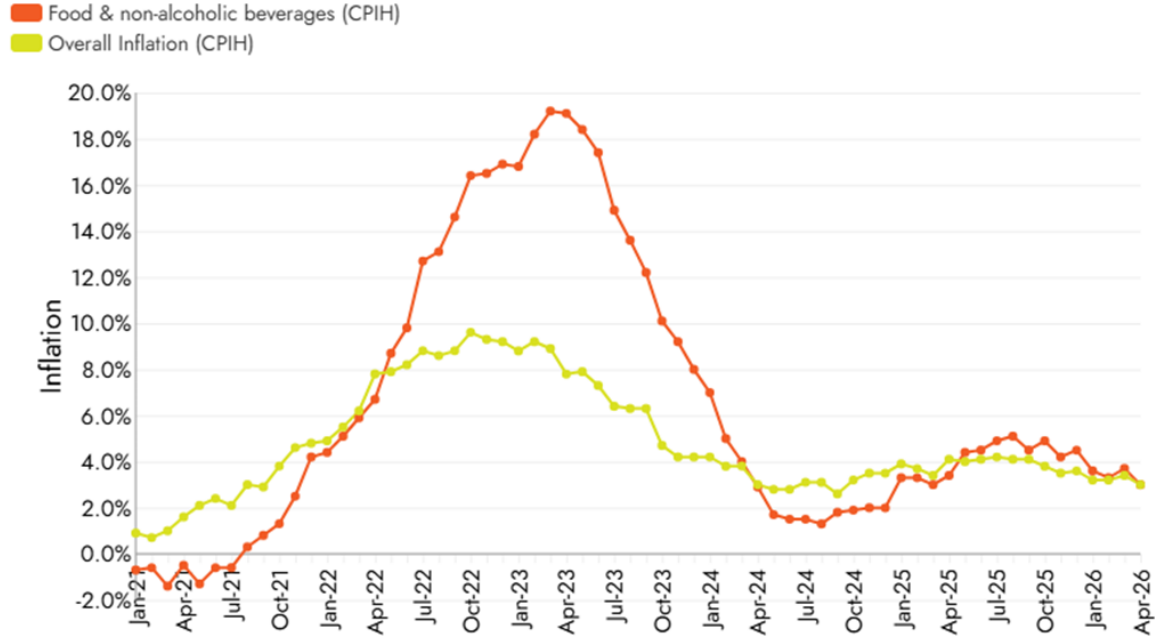


% Overweight/obese

Age 11



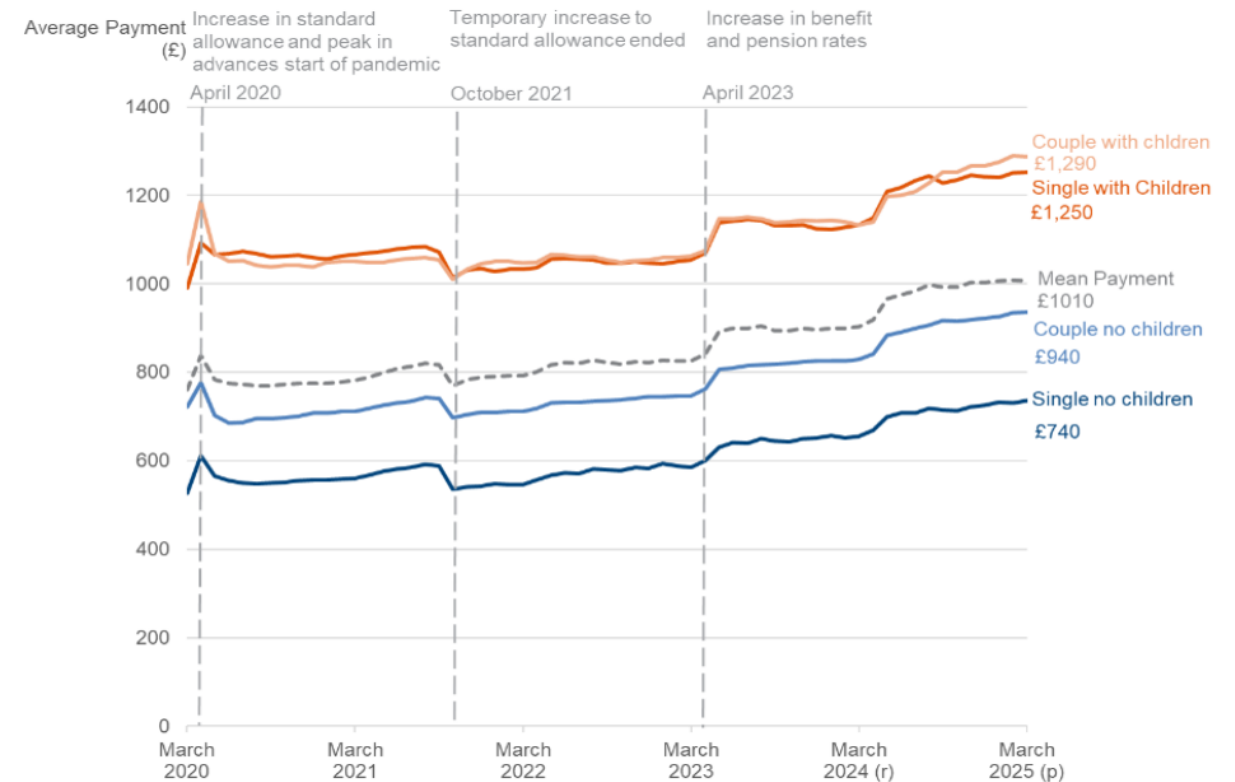
Overall Inflation vs Food Inflation



Source: [ONS, Consumer price inflation tables](#)



UK Food prices rose 38.6% between 2020-2025



Mean Universal Credit payments rose by 26% over a similar period

Households with children payments rose by 22%



In Summary

Foodbank clients experience high prevalence of very low food security

Approximately 50% of clients are at high risk of malnutrition

Dietary quality is significantly lower for foodbank users than the general population

The low intake of fresh food increases risks of nutritional deficiencies and negatively impacts on childhood development

In the UK, Malnourished people:



- Saw their GP twice as often,
- Had 3 times the number of hospital admissions and
- Stayed in a hospital more than 3 days longer than those who were well-nourished
- Have more ill health (co-morbidities)

Costs to the UK:

The cost of malnutrition to the health and care system was around £19.6 billion, in England, in 2011-12

Treating someone who is malnourished is two to three times more expensive than for someone who is not malnourished

Estimated health and social care expenditure per capita is **£2,417**.
For those malnourished or at risk, the expenditure rises to **£7,408**

Acknowledgements

All the staff and volunteers at the Barnet and Camden foodbanks

The foodbank clients who completed our surveys

The MSc students who collected the data

UCL Colleagues

George Grimble

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Efstathia Papada

