



# Improving nutrition for mothers and children

Good nutrition early on is the foundation for a healthy and productive life as an adult. Children who get adequate energy and nutrients during the first two years of life are more likely to experience better health, complete more schooling, and earn more money when they grow up.

Without proper nutrition, children suffer devastating consequences. Malnutrition leads to more severe childhood illnesses, stunted physical and mental growth, and death. Many undernourished children are too fragile to survive even the most common illnesses like diarrhea. As a result, malnutrition is an underlying cause of more than one out of every three child deaths in poor countries each year and a major contributor to the burden of disease worldwide.

## Saving lives through early interventions

It is critical to act early, before a child suffers irreversible damage from malnutrition. Many lives can be saved through low-cost measures to improve nutrition early in life. Interventions that begin during pregnancy and continue through a child's second year show the greatest potential for preventing the devastating effects of malnutrition.

The Infant and Young Child Nutrition (IYCN) Project is working in countries around the world, with activities in Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean, to prevent malnutrition and give children a chance for a healthy and productive life. Our vision is to use maternal, infant, and young child nutrition as a way to improve the impact of global health programs. Improving nutri-

tion practices can reduce the malnutrition that contributes so substantially to infant and child morbidity and mortality in the developing world.

## Promoting optimal nutrition practices

The approach of the IYCN Project is based on international recommendations for optimal nutrition practices that improve health outcomes and save lives. We assist families, communities, and countries in using the following optimal nutrition practices.

### Optimal maternal nutrition practices

A chance for a healthy life begins during pregnancy, when children depend on their mothers to get essential energy, protein, fats, and micronutrients. We support mothers to increase the quality, quantity, and diversity of their diets and promote the use of micronutrient supplements when needed during pregnancy and lactation.

### Optimal breastfeeding practices

One of the best ways to prevent the consequences of malnutrition is to ensure that mothers and families understand and are empowered to follow good breastfeeding practices. Breastmilk is the perfect food for babies. It has all the nutrients and antibodies that a baby needs to thrive during the first six months of life. In addition, it is safe, hygienic, and readily available at no cost. That's why mothers should breastfeed exclusively during this time—without adding any other foods or liquids, including water. We promote exclusive breastfeeding and other good breastfeeding practices.

Photos: PATH/Mike Wang; PATH; Philippe Blanc; Aurelio Ayala III

## Optimal complementary feeding practices

From 6 and 24 months of age, children need additional complementary foods in addition to breastmilk to ensure that they continue to grow and thrive. We encourage mothers to give their children the appropriate amounts of high-quality, hygienically prepared complementary foods to meet their children's nutritional needs. In communities where traditional complementary foods lack the nutrients young children require, we support the use of innovative products like fortified complementary foods, micronutrient powders, or lipid-based nutrient supplements to prevent malnutrition during this critical time frame.

## Improved infant feeding during and after illness

We also promote improved nutrition for infants during and after illness—when children need additional breastmilk, foods, and fluids depending on their age. We help mothers prevent their children from getting dehydrated and losing weight when they are sick and make sure they regain any lost weight or fluids after an illness.

## Safe feeding practices for infants affected by HIV/AIDS

Children with HIV-positive mothers have special nutritional needs. We provide nutritional guidance according to international recommendations to ensure safe and optimal infant feeding practices, reduce the risk of HIV transmission from mothers to their children, and promote HIV-free survival. We support HIV-positive mothers in making the most appropriate decisions about feeding their children.

## Preventing malnutrition through national and community efforts

Despite the benefits of good nutrition practices that save lives and help prevent the transmission of HIV, many communities are not aware of them or do not have access to programs that can help. Mothers and families urgently need counseling and other support to overcome barriers to using good nutrition practices.

We are addressing this need by providing technical assistance to countries in scaling up proven, cost-effective

nutrition interventions. Our tailored country activities include needs assessments, enhancing national nutrition policies, capacity-building and training, and behavior change communication and social mobilization. We also provide global leadership in nutrition programming by identifying and sharing good practices to improve the impact of infant, young child, and maternal nutrition programs internationally.

### IMPROVING CAREGIVER PRACTICES

Volunteer health workers, like Mamorena Namane, reach out to families. Mamorena is from rural Lesotho, a country in southern Africa, where more than one-third of children younger than five years of age are short in stature. In her community, mothers often delay breastfeeding until their baby's umbilical cord falls off—a common cultural practice that can leave them susceptible to illness. When pregnant with her second child, Mamorena participated in an IYCN training workshop and learned the benefits of good breastfeeding practices. Her first child was frequently ill as an infant, but Mamorena breastfed her second child immediately; he's grown into a big, healthy boy. Now, Mamorena talks with other women in her community about optimal breastfeeding practices and helps them overcome cultural barriers so that their children may be healthy too.

Learn more about the IYCN Project  
at [www.iycn.org](http://www.iycn.org)

### ABOUT THE INFANT AND YOUNG CHILD NUTRITION PROJECT

The Infant and Young Child Nutrition Project is funded by the United States Agency for International Development. The project is led by PATH and includes three partners: CARE, the Manoff Group, and University Research Co., LLC. For more information, please contact [info@iycn.org](mailto:info@iycn.org).