

UNICEF in Action - Nourishing children day by day for a lifetime

A well-nourished child is born of a healthy mother, exclusively breastfed from birth to six months and sustained through a daily intake of high-quality nutrients that foster growth and learning. These essentials depend on a “safety net” of sound family feeding practices, laws, policies and systems, working together to safeguard every child’s right to good nutrition.

UNICEF’s nutrition programmes include:



Protecting Maternal Health: Mothers are children’s first line of defence against undernutrition. Without essential micronutrients such as zinc, iodine and iron (folate), women are more likely to die in pregnancy or childbirth and give birth to underweight babies – an important cause of infant mortality. UNICEF provides micronutrient supplements and pre-natal care for pregnant and breast-feeding women through programmes such as the Low Birthweight Prevention Initiative. In poor communities UNICEF works to tackle the discrimination and workloads eroding women’s physical and psychological health. *Photo: UNICEF/HQ99-0632/Giacomo Pirozzi*



Promoting exclusive breastfeeding: Exclusive breastfeeding provides ideal nutrition and health protection for infants for the first six months of life, containing all the nutrients, antibodies, hormones, immune factors and antioxidants an infant needs to thrive. UNICEF works with governments, the health sector and families to develop policy and community support for exclusive breastfeeding, provide counselling and nutritional care for pregnant women and new mothers, support baby-friendly hospitals and health centres, train health workers and monitor infant growth rates. *Photo: UNICEF/HQ02-0330/Giacomo Pirozzi*



Eliminating Iodine Deficiency Disorder (IDD): Iodine deficiency disorder (IDD) is caused by a lack of minute quantities of iodine in daily diets and is the leading cause of preventable mental retardation in children. UNICEF is working with partners to eliminate iodine deficiency through the universal iodization of household salt. This drive has dramatically cut the number of countries affected by IDD in half over the last ten years. In the early 1990s less than one in five households consumed iodized salt, while today coverage has soared to over two-thirds (69%), protecting 82 million newborns against IDD. *Photo: UNICEF/HQ96-0643/Japp*



Preventing anaemia (iron deficiency): Around two billion people worldwide suffer from anaemia, a major cause of cognitive defects in young children and maternal deaths. Adolescent girls and pregnant women are at particularly vulnerable to anaemia - putting their own lives and their babies at risk. Anaemia is implicated in at least 20 per cent of maternal deaths in Africa and Asia. UNICEF provides iron supplements to adolescent girls and pregnant women, holds community education campaigns on anaemia and supports malaria prevention (a major cause of iron deficiency). UNICEF is also helping governments and food manufacturers to fortify household flour with iron. *Photo: UNICEF/HQ04-1258/Giacomo Pirozzi*



Saving lives with vitamin A supplementation: Vitamin A deficiency (VAD) affects the immune system, putting children at far greater risk of dying from common childhood diseases such as measles and diarrhoea. It also causes blindness. At least 100 million children under five may be affected by VAD – but a twice-yearly dose of vitamin A supplement can decrease VAD-related deaths by 23 per cent. UNICEF supplies 95 per cent of the world's vitamin A supplements for developing countries and helps to distribute them during immunization campaigns. UNICEF also educates families on natural sources of vitamin A. This effort is saving at least 300,000 lives every year.

Photo: UNICEF/HQ00-0250/Giacomo Pirozzi



Nutrition support for children affected by HIV/AIDS:

Fighting HIV/AIDS is one of UNICEF's organizational priorities – and good nutrition plays a major role. UNICEF's nutrition programmes help to prevent mother-to-child HIV transmission during breastfeeding by providing infant feeding counselling for pregnant women, supporting the best infant feeding practices in homes and hospitals and promoting policies that protect exclusive breastfeeding and provide HIV guidelines for non-infected women. UNICEF works to protect the nutritional rights of HIV-infected mothers and children, as well as children who are orphaned or living with an HIV-infected parent. *Photo: UNICEF/HQ04-0167/Roger LeMoyné*



For children in crisis - growth monitoring, breastfeeding support, therapeutic and supplementary feeding:

Emergencies, such as droughts, famine and war, can cause a swift and drastic decline in children's nutritional status, particularly where undernutrition existed before. In some countries, chronic poverty and deprivation makes every day an emergency for children. In times of crisis, UNICEF is always one of the first on the ground to meet the nutritional needs of children, saving lives and speeding recovery. UNICEF supports 24 hour feeding centres for severely malnourished children with weighing scales, height boards and technical support. UNICEF helps mothers to continue breastfeeding in stressful times of crisis, provides specially fortified and digestible foods for children under-five, gives essential nutritional supplements to pregnant and breastfeeding women and brings food to orphans. Working with partners like WFP, UNICEF also helps households to find adequate nourishment in the longer term. *Photo: UNICEF/HQ05-0636/Boris Heger*