
NUTRITION MATTERS
ZINC FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF ACUTE DIARRHEA
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Dear colleagues;

As you all know, acute diarrhea is a leading cause of child mortality in the developing world, where an estimated 1.5 million underfives die each year as a result of acute diarrhea. In the late 1970s, UNICEF and WHO adopted oral rehydration salts (ORS) and oral rehydration therapy (ORT) for the prevention and treatment of dehydration in children with diarrhea. Since then, a single formulation of glucose-based ORS has been used - no matter the cause or affected age group - to prevent or treat diarrheal dehydration. It is estimated that in the 1990s, more than one million diarrhea-related deaths were prevented annually as a result of the promotion and use of ORS and ORT. Recent scientific advances show that the number of deaths attributable to diarrhea can be further reduced through: a) the use of an improved ORS solution with reduced levels of glucose and salt (i.e. reduced total osmolarity) and b) the use of zinc supplements.

ORS with reduced osmolarity (245 mml/l) is more effective than the standard ORS for use in children with acute non-cholera diarrhea and is as safe and effective as standard ORS for use in children with cholera. Health-care workers treating children for diarrhea are encouraged to provide caretakers with two 1-litre packets of the new ORS, for home-use until the diarrhea stops. Zinc supplementation reduces the severity and duration of diarrhea episodes and prevents further occurrences in the ensuing 2-3 months. Health-care workers treating children for acute diarrhea are encouraged to provide caretakers with 20 mg per day of zinc supplementation for 10-14 days (10 mg per day for infants under six months old) to curtail the severity of the episode and prevent further occurrences in following 2-3 months. The administration of ORS and zinc supplements should be coupled with continue feeding (or increase breastfeeding) during the diarrhea episode. All feeding should be increased after the episode.

Attachment: WHO/UNICEF joint statement: Clinical management of acute diarrhea

ENJOY! (... and share with your colleagues and counterparts).

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