



# FEEDING YOUNG CHILDREN 1

Feeding children aged 6 months to 2 years

## THE IDEA

A child who eats plenty of good food is more likely to be strong, active and healthy. The child is seldom ill, and recovers quickly from most illnesses. A child who eats too little is weak, less active and often sick.

Ideally, a baby needs breast milk only and no other food or drink for at least the first four, and if possible, the first six months of their life (see Activity Sheet 2.4 for more information on **Breastfeeding**). After six months, the baby needs plenty of breast milk and increasing amounts of other clean, good foods. A young child cannot eat much at one time so they should suckle and eat frequently (see box below on Breastfeeding and HIV and AIDS).

Sick children need plenty of good food so that they can fight infections and recover faster.

Some children with disabilities experience difficulty when they are eating. Making sure that they are in a comfortable position and having patience will help these children to overcome their difficulties. Children with a disability have the same nutrition needs as other children. It may be useful to seek advice from other families in the community who also have a child with disabilities in order to learn how to feed the child.

## Breastfeeding and HIV and AIDS

The spread of HIV and AIDS has meant the message on breastfeeding – that it is the very best start in life for a baby – is no longer so straightforward. This is because of the risk that the virus will be transmitted to the baby through the mother's milk. It is a complex issue with opinions and advice given changing, depending on the mother's situation and the latest research. One opinion is that where bottle-feeding is affordable and levels of hygiene are good, then this is recommended if the risk of mother-to-child transmission of the virus is high. If a mother who is HIV-positive chooses replacement feeding, she must be supported in her choice, particularly in areas where women who do not breastfeed may be stigmatised. However, in areas where infant formula is expensive and hygiene poor, breastfeeding is promoted over bottle-feeding. The risks to the baby of ill health as a result of poor nourishment and disease spread by contaminated water and poor hygiene outweigh the danger of HIV and AIDS transmission. Women who are infected, or suspect that they may be infected, should consult a trained local health worker for counselling and advice on all possible options about how to reduce the risk of infecting the child.

## Understanding

### ***Facts about feeding young children***

Children who do not eat enough are quiet, apathetic (not interested in what is happening) and learn slowly. They are thin and small for their age. They are often sick and take a long time to recover from illnesses. Some of these children become progressively thinner, weaker and sicker and eventually die.

To grow well and to be healthy young children need:

**Enough food** Young children need small, frequent servings throughout the day to consume enough food. A 9–11-month-old infant needs about 830 k calories of energy per day, some of which will be obtained from continued breastfeeding and some from other foods served about three to four times in the day. Food that equals about 830 k calories is, for example, three heaped teacups of cooked food, such as porridge

enriched with oil or butter with added lemon juice for vitamin C and green leafy vegetables for iron.

**A mixture of foods** Children's food must provide them with enough of each kind of nutrient so that:

- They have energy to play, explore and learn.
- They can grow at a healthy rate.
- They can resist and fight infections and recover quickly from an illness.

Children need **vitamin A** to resist illness and to prevent night blindness. Vitamin A can be found in many fruits, ripe mangoes and papayas, for example, and vegetables such as yellow sweet potatoes, carrots and dark green leafy vegetables. It is found in oils, eggs, dairy products, fortified foods, breast milk and in vitamin A supplements.

Children need **iron-rich** foods to protect their physical and mental abilities. The best sources of iron are liver, lean meats, fish, eggs, iron-fortified foods and iron supplements.

**Iodine**, which is usually obtained through iodised salt, is essential for children's growth and development. If a child does not get enough iodine, or the mother is deficient in iodine during pregnancy, the child is likely to be born with a learning, hearing or speech disability, or may have delayed physical or mental development.

**Breast milk** alone provides all the energy, nutrients and water a child needs up to the age of about six months. After six months of age, the child needs other foods in addition to breast milk to get enough energy and nutrients to grow well. But young children have small stomachs and cannot eat much at one time.

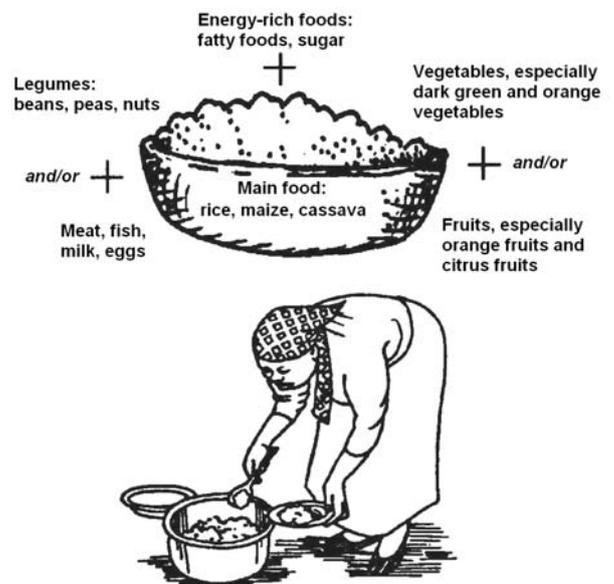
**So, to get enough nutrients a child of weaning age between six months and two years old, must:**

- **Eat often.** The child should suckle frequently; in addition a child of 6–8 months should have a meal or snack two to three times a day; a child of 9–11 months should have a meal or snack three to four times a day and child of 12–23 months should have a meal or snack four to five times a day.



- **Eat energy-rich and nutrient-rich foods.**

This means foods that contain a lot of energy and nutrients in a small volume.



Examples of **good mixed meals** for young children are:

- Maize porridge made with groundnuts and a slice of papaya.
- Rice mixed with lentils, oil and spinach.
- Boiled cassava mashed and eaten with fish cooked with red palm oil and cassava leaves.

Often the first weaning food is a soft porridge. But most plain porridges contain a lot of water and are not rich in energy and nutrients. Some of the water for cooking the porridge can be replaced with whole milk, soured milk, coconut milk or cream to improve the nutrient and energy content. Also adding one or more of the foods below enriches the porridge.

For example:

***For extra energy/fat:***

Oil, margarine, butter, coconut, cream, whole milk, flour made from groundnut, soya or other oilseeds.

***For extra protein:***

Beans, peas, soya beans, lentils, groundnuts, eggs, milk, fish, meat.

***For extra vitamins:***

Fruits, such as papaya, mango and oranges and vegetables such as carrots, pumpkins, tomatoes and dark green leaves.

## **Good ideas to make sure young children eat enough good food**

Give a young child his own plate of food so he can eat his share of food at his own speed and not have to compete with older children.

Young children need to eat frequently but it is difficult for many families to cook more than once or twice a day. So children can be given snacks. These are foods that, used separately or together, make good snacks:

- Fruits such as papaya, mango, oranges, avocado, bananas.
- Cooked plantain, cassava, potato.
- Boiled or soured milk.
- Coconut cream, groundnut or soya paste, margarine or butter.
- Bread, chapattis, doughnuts, biscuits.

Some of these foods may not be available or may be too expensive. The local health or nutrition worker should know about suitable foods and meals for your area.

Children should avoid too many soda or sugary drinks, candy and sweet iced lollies. These are not good snacks because, if eaten too often, they can cause tooth decay. They have no nutritional value.

Young children often get diarrhoea and other infections from dirty or contaminated foods and drinks. To avoid this, mothers should prepare and serve meals with fresh foods using clean utensils. Food should be cooked thoroughly and not be kept for a long time before feeding the child. The

child's hands and the hands of the person serving the food should be washed before the child eats. Food left in containers for any length of time should be kept covered with a clean lid or cloth to stop flies contaminating it.

## **Feeding sick children**

Sick children usually eat very little because they are not hungry. Sometimes the family gives them less food, or more watery food. This is one reason why sick children lose weight. But sick children need food and nutrients so their bodies can fight germs, strengthen their immune systems and continue to grow. Here are some helpful ideas:

- Feed the sick child often – at least every two to three hours, or more often if he will take food.
- Give the child plenty to drink, especially if he has diarrhoea or fever.
- Remember that any food is better than no food but try to give good mixed meals.
- If the child still breastfeeds, encourage the mother to continue.
- Give foods the child likes, such as mashed foods or sweet foods.
- Give foods the child can eat easily. Many sick children prefer food that is thin and smooth so that they do not have to chew, for example, soup or food that is well mashed.
- Wash your hands before preparing the child's food and before feeding him. Wash the utensils carefully.
- Before feeding, wash the child, clean his mouth and nose and make him comfortable.
- Hold the child in a comfortable position and talk or sing to him. Give him lots of attention. Do not get angry with him.
- Encourage the child to eat but do not force him – he may vomit or choke.
- Make feeding into a game.
- Do not feed the child when he is sleepy.

When a child starts to recover, he will be hungry and able to eat more than usual. If he is given extra food he will regain lost

weight quickly – ‘catch-up growth’. A recovering child should be given frequent meals with as much food as he can eat until he weighs more than, or is as heavy as, he was before he was sick. In this way he will quickly become strong again.

## Ideas for deepening children’s understanding

Young children need plenty of food to grow well. Children can observe the connection between food and growing by observing two caterpillars. One caterpillar is given plenty of the leaves it likes to eat and the other almost nothing, or the wrong kind of leaf. After several days children can compare the size of the caterpillars. The one that has been well fed is bigger. Why?



Food gives energy. Children can discuss what they feel like when they are hungry. Do they feel tired, not interested in what is happening around them, find concentrating difficult and so on?

**Different foods contain different amounts of nutrients.** Children can identify which local foods are rich in nutrients. Children can learn the importance of different nutrients, for example, iron stops us feeling tired and vitamin A is good for eyes. Children can **feel** that some foods contain more fat than others. They can compare cereal flour with groundnut or coconut flour or fatty meat. They can **see** the green of vitamin A in dark green leafy vegetables. They can **taste** that some foods contain more sugar than others. They can compare plain porridge or raw potato with pineapple or sugar cane.

**Fatty foods are energy rich.** Children can

find a ‘measure’, such as a small can, cup or large level spoon, of oil. They can ask other children to guess how many measures of raw cereal flour contain the same amount of energy. The answer is approximately four measures. They can draw or show this and ask which food is the richest in energy.

**Some foods are richer in vitamins, such as vitamin A, than others.** Children can prepare a ‘measure’, such as a cup, of chopped banana and a ‘measure’ of chopped ripe mango or papaya and ask other children which contains the most vitamin A. Children can compare equal amounts of other vegetables – onion with pumpkin, carrot or green leaves, for example.

**Children need a mixture of foods.**

Children can prepare small plates of cooked rice or other staple food and then add foods to make a good mixed meal. They could make clay models or pictures of food and use these to play a game of choosing a healthy mixed meal.

## Finding out more

Children can visit the clinic and talk to the health worker. The health worker can demonstrate how babies are weighed and checked at the clinic. They can say why it is important to do this and explain why babies may lose weight. Children can collect a sample of the clinic weight card and examine it. (See Activity Sheet 2.2 **Feeding Young Children 2: How do we know if they are eating enough?** for more information on weighing and recording.)

Children can plan surveys on breastfeeding, different types of weaning foods, and at what age weaning starts. It may not be appropriate to ask such questions in some cultures. The teachers or other responsible adults must consult with community members before starting such an activity.

Children can ask at home:

- What is the first weaning food given to babies?
- What other foods are given to babies 6–12 months old?
- How long are children usually breastfed?
- Which foods are given to sick children?

Children can watch young children being fed and note:

- What food do they eat?
- How often do they eat?
- Are hands washed before eating/feeding?
- At what age do children feed themselves?
- Do young children have their own separate bowls, or eat from the family dish?
- Do some children have difficulties with feeding? Is there knowledge on how to help the child?

### Planning and doing

Children can discuss the results from their surveys and their other finding-out activities. They can take action to help themselves, other children and adults to obtain and eat good foods. It is important to understand that nutrition and under-nutrition are very sensitive subjects and that the children's activities must not upset people in their community.

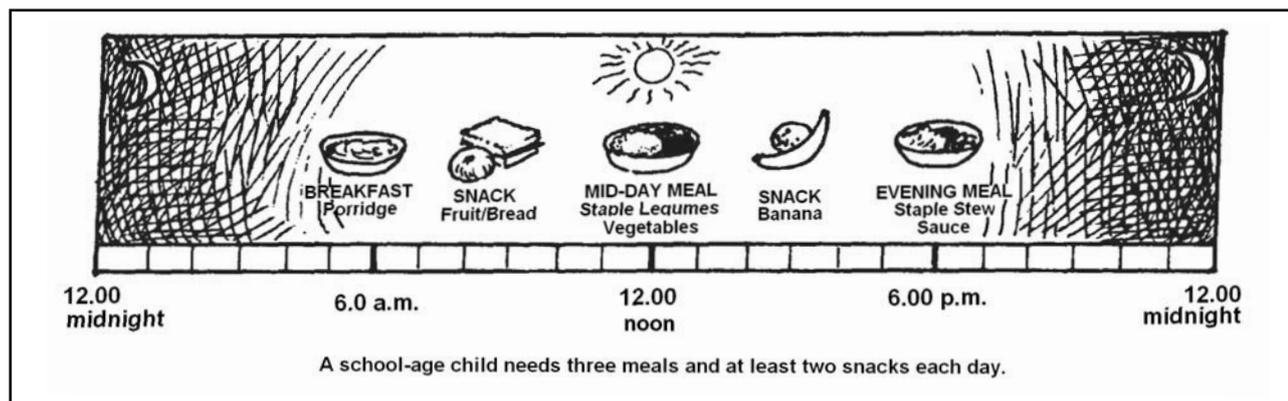
Many activities can take place in the children's own homes. Nutrition can be taught in a wide range of subjects such as science, mathematics, art and language lessons.

Here are some ideas:

- Children can plan meals for a young child for a day or for a week.
- They can role-play mealtimes with younger children – pretend to feed a doll and make sure that children wash hands before 'feeding'.
- They can draw different foods, make a poster display of different meals and show these to their families. They can discuss how to improve the meals.

- Children can make a recipe book of good mixed meals and snacks for young children from locally-available, low-cost foods and share the ideas with friends and family.
- They can bring healthy snacks/packed lunches to school.
- Children can draw a 24-hour 'time line'. Below is a time line to show the food needed by a school age child. Children can draw a similar time line and mark the times when a one-year-old child should be breastfed and when they should have a meal or snack. They can discuss what foods to give at each meal or snack.
- Children can role-play feeding a sick child or a child who has difficulty in feeding and discuss it afterwards.
- They can make a plan of how to feed a child who is recovering from an illness and is often hungry.
- They can hold a quiz in teams and ask questions such as, 'Name three fat-rich foods to add to plain weaning porridge' and 'What is the best food for a four-month-old baby?'
- They can make up stories, like the one on the next page, to tell to other children and ask questions such as:  
*Why was Hyena miserable?*  
*What did Dr Guinea Fowl advise Hyena to eat?*  
*Was this good advice – if yes, why?*  
*Do they know of any young children in their community with the same problem as Hyena?*

One of the best ways for children to understand about food is to grow and eat



their own (see Activity Sheet 2.3 **Growing and Eating Vegetables**).

Many schools have school gardens. Herbs and vegetables can be grown in pots at home and at school.

## Discussing the results of activities

After doing these activities children ask each other questions, such as:

- How many of us are now helping to feed young children?
- Have we fed a child who is sick? What advice could we give to others?
- Have we helped a child who has difficulty in feeding? What helped the child to overcome his/her difficulties?
- Are younger children being fed 'little and often' or do their mealtimes have to fit around adults' mealtimes?
- What causes babies and young children to lose weight?
- Have we helped to prepare meals for younger children? What foods did we use? What foods did the children enjoy most?
- Have we taken home any of our work (for example, a poster) and shown it to our family? How did they react? Were there any problems? Did they agree to practise the message?

## Doing it better

This is an ongoing process. There may be activities that the teacher, youth leader, health worker or the children themselves feel need repeating in order to improve their own understanding and skills and other people in the community. There may be mistakes that need correcting or written materials that need rewriting to make the messages clearer. It is important that time is spent doing this. Other issues, problems or anxieties may have come up that the adults need to explore further with the children. Poor nutrition, and its causes, is a very sensitive subject. New topics can be discussed and selected with children at this stage.

### How Hyena tricked Hare

*Hyena is miserable. He can no longer see in the dark. He feels weak. The other animals laugh at him, none louder than Hare. Fat and healthy from eating carrots and greens, Hare teases Hyena without mercy, keeping just out of reach. 'Old chicken-eyes', Hare calls him. In despair, Hyena consults Dr Guinea Fowl who tells him to eat yellow and red fruit such as papaya and ripe mango and dark green leafy vegetables. Gradually Hyena's sight and strength come back but he does not tell Hare. Every night Hare continues to tease Hyena. Every night Hyena appears to have more difficulty seeing; he even begins to wear dark glasses and use a white stick. Every night Hare gets closer, until one night he gets too close. Hyena pounces. He has his revenge!*

## USING THIS SHEET

**Teachers and health workers** can use this sheet. The topic **healthy food** is central to every health education programme and is taught in every programme that uses the Child-to-Child approach. It can be a sensitive issue – see the box on breastfeeding, for example – and needs to be handled carefully. There are many different ways of teaching this information. For example, in Egypt and Jordan nutrition messages are given over the radio to mothers and to children in school to take back home. This Activity Sheet can be used in conjunction with the sheets 2.2 **Feeding Young Children 2: How do we know if they are eating enough?**, 2.3 **Growing and Eating Vegetables**, 3.3 **Children's Faeces and Hygiene**, 3.4 **Clean, Safe Water**, 6.3 **Intestinal Worms**, and 6.4 **Immunisation**.

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