

NUTRITION FOR THE CHILD WITH HIV/AIDS

Poor nutrition is a common complication of HIV infection. Poor nutrition weakens an already poor immune system. Because children are still growing and developing, they need more energy, proteins and other nutrients. This means that poor nutrition causes more serious problems in children living with HIV/AIDS. These problems include a poor growth pattern and almost all children with HIV/AIDS grow slower.

Causes of Poor Nutrition in Children with HIV/AIDS

- **Medication.** The child may not eat well because of nausea or vomiting. This can sometimes be caused by the medicines that form part of the treatment.
- **Difficulty with eating.** Thrush in the mouth can make eating and swallowing difficult and painful.
- **Lack of food.** This happens when the child is not given enough food of the right kind.
- **Infections.** When the child has an infection he or she will not feel like eating. If the child has a fever as well, the child will need more nutrients.
- **Diarrhoea.** HIV causes changes in the gut, which means that food cannot be absorbed adequately by the body. This leads to diarrhoea. Diarrhoea that goes on for a long time will lead to poor nutrition. Fats and oils in the food can make the diarrhoea worse. Milk sugar (*or lactose*) may not be well digested and it will sometimes help to avoid milk for a short period while the child has diarrhoea.
- **Illness in the caregiver.** If the child was born to a mother with HIV, she may be unable to care for the child properly when her own illness makes her feel very weak.

Support for the Child with HIV/AIDS

It is very important to measure the growth of the child with HIV/AIDS. The weight of the child will be important. The idea is that the child should grow and gain weight along the pattern that is expected for his or her age. Weighing is done at community and child-care clinics. Only one measurement cannot give a good idea of the growth of the child. Take the child to the clinic for regular weighing. Almost all children with HIV/AIDS grow slower, so it is important that you take care of the child, but do not panic if the growth is a little slow. During times when the child is ill, it is most important to try to keep the weight stable. If the weight can be kept stable during the worst times, there is hope that growth will take place when the child recovers. As soon as the child begins to lose weight extra care must be given. Weight is often an indication that something is wrong. Weight loss can be an indication that the child has an infection.

Ways to help the child with HIV/AIDS:

- It helps to encourage the child to eat small portions of food more regularly than usual.
- Increase the intake of protein by adding dried milk powder or peanut butter to the food.
- Increase the intake of energy by adding small amounts of cooking oil, margarine or butter to the child's food
- Give the child food that is soft, moist and easy to chew and swallow. This is very important when the child has thrush.
- If the child has problems digesting milk, try yoghurt or sour milk products like maas and buttermilk. Yoghurt can also help if the child has diarrhoea.

Feeding recommendations for older children with HIV/AIDS are the same as for all children, but they have extra nutritional needs that must be taken into account. Young children need to be fed patiently with supervision and care. This is especially true for HIV infected children, who are frequently ill and have poor appetite. Most children can eat all the foods of an adult eating pattern by

the time they are one year old. Very spicy foods are however not suitable for children before the age of one. Care must be taken to ensure that the child eats a variety of locally available foods. Healthy snacks like sandwiches, cheese and fruit between meals can be helpful to increase food intake. Older children and teenagers often have strong food likes and dislikes, which could lead to poor nutrition. Healthy food choices for children older than 5 years are the same as for adults (*See Food Choices*). Growing increases the child's nutritional needs over and above the needs imposed by HIV/AIDS. As a child gets older portion sizes must be increased to supply the extra nutrient for growth needs. Children are often very active and use a lot of energy during the day. Special care should be taken to make enough food available to meet all the nutritional requirements. During and after infections the child should receive more food.

..Water, water, water..

The child with HIV/AIDS may often have diarrhoea or vomiting. Both diarrhoea and vomiting cause a loss of water from the child's body. This is called **dehydration**. Because of their smaller bodies **children become dehydrated more quickly than adults**. Diarrhoea and dehydration is a major cause of death in young children in developing countries. It is very important to replace any water that is lost during diarrhoea or vomiting. After every vomit or loose stool the child should be given some **water and salt replacement** made with the **homemade recipe** below.

ORAL REHYDRATION THERAPY

A homemade recipe for water replacement

- Use **1 litre clean and safe water** (*see page 21*)
- Add **8 level teaspoons sugar**
- Add **½ teaspoon table salt**
- Mix well
- Store in a clean and covered container
- Keep the solution in a cool place it
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MAKE A FRESH SOLUTION EVERY DAY

Other fluids may also be given to the child as long as it is **clean and safe**. Thin porridge, water,

soup, tea, or rice-water all help to prevent dehydration.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

Nutrition is very important for all people. For people living with HIV/AIDS it becomes an important part of their treatment. Healthy ways of eating were discussed earlier in the guidelines, but people need more than food. Food nourishes the body, but the mind must also be healthy. When one is worried and under stress the immune system is weakened. Here are some guidelines for living a healthier life with or without HIV/AIDS.

Be kind to yourself. Try to keep a positive attitude. We know that feeling good is part of being healthy.

Get regular exercise:

- Exercise helps to build muscle. This is important to prevent weight loss.
- Do not put too much stress on your body when you are not feeling well, though. Take it slow when you have diarrhoea, a cough or fever.
- Exercise helps people to feel better about themselves.

Try not to smoke:

- Smoke from cigarettes harms the lungs. Smoking causes more lung infections which can be very serious with HIV/AIDS.
- If you really cannot stop, at least smoke less.

Get enough rest and sleep.

Try not to worry too much. Stress can harm your immune system.

Get good advice:

- If you have any medical problems, ask for advice from health workers. Many of the problems can be treated.
- The sooner you seek help, the easier treatment can be.

Avoid unnecessary medicines: