

The First 1000 Days

MALNUTRITION

What is malnutrition?

A child is said to be malnourished when s/he fails to grow and develop to her/his potential – that is, when s/he fails to grow or develop as much as expected for an average healthy child of the same age. While all children have the ability to grow at the same rate until age five, under nutrition often goes unrecognized because children live in communities where being thin or of short stature is so common that it seems normal, or because its serious consequences are not widely understood. When a child is malnourished, it means that essential physical and mental growth processes are being compromised.

Malnutrition is of two types – under nutrition (underweight, stunting, wasting, and micro-nutrient deficiencies) and over nutrition (overweight, obesity, and nutrition related chronic diseases such as diabetes). In Bihar, we are particularly interested in reducing under-nutrition, particularly stunting and wasting and ensuring that all children are healthy and Bihar is free from malnutrition.

What do stunting, wasting, and underweight mean?

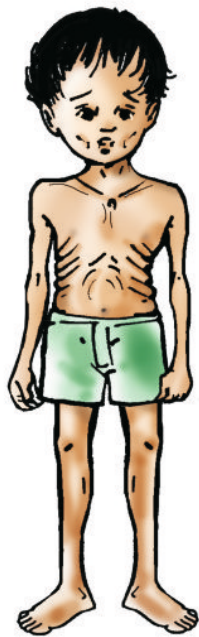
Stunting: If a child is found to be stunted, it means s/he has not been gaining height for a long time. This is either because s/he has been unwell and/or s/he has not been fed adequately for a long time. It can take a very long time to catch up the height that was not gained, and usually, the child never catches up.

Wasting: If a child is found to be wasted it means s/he is very thin and has a very low weight for his/her height. This is usually the result of an illness, which causes weight loss. If the illness is treated, and s/he is fed well, the child can recover lost weight quite rapidly. If not fed well for long, s/he will fail to grow and become stunted as well. Very thin and wasted children can fall seriously ill and die.

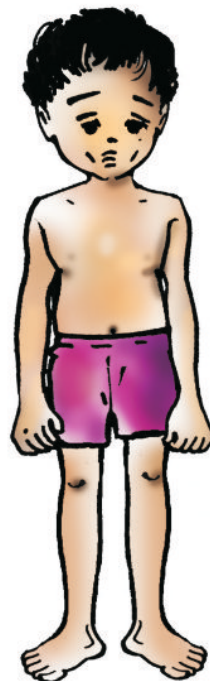
Underweight: If a child is found to be underweight, it means s/he has a low weight for his/her age. A child may be underweight because s/he is stunted or wasted or both. Getting back to normal weight will take less or more time depending on whether there is more of wasting or stunting.



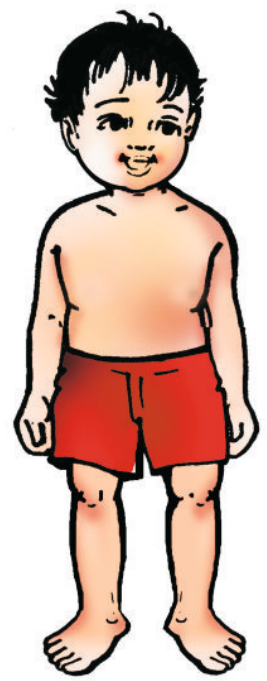
Stunting



Wasting



Underweight



Normal

What happens if a child is malnourished?

If under-nutrition is not prevented and/or addressed, it can result in serious short-term, medium term, and long term consequences:

Short Term Consequences	Medium Term Consequences	Long Term Consequences
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Weaker immune system and a greater risk of infection and disease• An increased risk of death• Poor cognitive and developmental outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Start school later and drop out.• Less able to learn due to compromised brain and mental development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Suffer from high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, and obesity• Have lower economic productivity and incomes• Undernourished women are more likely to have small and underweight babies-leading to an intergenerational cycle of poor nutrition and poverty

In many ways, under-nutrition impacts not just the individual, but his/her family, the community, and the state. The good news is that malnutrition can be prevented by ensuring that women and children are appropriately nourished during the first 1000 days of life starting from pregnancy to the time a child is 24 months old.

Why are the first 1000 days so important?

From 1997 to 2003, the World Health Organization conducted a “growth reference study” to see how children grow. The study found that children all over the world (whether in Bihar, Delhi, America or other countries) grow exactly the same if they receive the same appropriate nutrition and care, particularly in the first 1000 days of life.

The first 1000 days are from the time a woman is pregnant up to the time a child is 24 months old and is a time of rapid growth for the child. Hence, it is critical to ensure that mothers and children are supported during this period to ensure that children grow to their full potential. If a child does not receive the nutrition, care and attention s/he needs during this time, then s/he will become malnourished and it is very difficult to reverse/treat the malnutrition once it has set in.

What can we do to create a state (Bihar) free from child malnutrition: To ensure that the future generation of children in Bihar is healthy and well-nourished and Bihar is free from malnutrition (Bal Kuposhan Mukta), we need to ensure the following:

- Women must be well nourished before they become pregnant for the first time and ideally should delay the first pregnancy to when they are at least 21 years old.
- All pregnant women and lactating mothers must be supported and encouraged to eat more and more diverse foods, including consumption of 100 IFA tablets during pregnancy
- All babies must be breastfed early (within one hour of birth) and exclusively for the first six months (180 days) and continue to be breastfed for up to 24 months. It is important to ensure that colostrum (the first, thick milk) is not discarded as it is like the newborn's first vaccine.
- Around 6 months (180 days) all babies must continue to be breastfed, and receive good quality complementary foods in addition to breast milk. The quantity of food received should be increased with increasing age, should be diverse (tiranga) and where possible include animal source products.
- Mothers and caregivers must wash their hands with soap before preparing food and feeding the child
- Open defecation must be eliminated
- Women must be supported to eat well between pregnancies and should ideally space births to three years to enable them to take care of themselves and their babies during the critical 0-24 month period

Mothers and caregivers must be encouraged to regularly track the weight and height of their children using the mother child cards (matri evam shishu raksha card or jaccha baccha card). If children are below the average for a healthy child of that age, immediate assistance and care must be sought to prevent the child from becoming severely malnourished. If, however, a child is identified as severely malnourished/wasted, s/he must be immediately referred to the Nutrition Rehabilitation Center of the district. Remember however, that prevention is better than cure, as once a child becomes stunted the damage is largely irreversible.

