

Join the Global Movement to Scale Up Nutrition

Today, developing countries are leading the effort to make infant and young child nutrition a top priority in national policies and programs. These countries are engaging partners across sectors – agriculture, business, education, government, health, social protection, and water, sanitation and hygiene – in order to mobilize resources, increase investments and scale up efforts to improve nutrition. The growing movement to scale up nutrition is built upon the knowledge that improved nutrition is the foundation for national *and* global development.

Do your part to make real and lasting change. Join the global movement to scale up nutrition.

Policymaker Action Steps

Policymakers must act now: Invest in the power of nutrition

- 1. Promote best nutrition practices during a mother's pregnancy and her child's first 2 years.**
 - Support programs and policies that improve nutrition for pregnant and lactating women.
 - Encourage policies and programs that focus on exclusive breastfeeding from birth to 6 months – such as strengthening the international code of marketing of breastmilk substitutes, national maternity leave policies, and programs that support scaling up nutrition through national health services.
 - Support programs that enable proper complementary feeding starting at 6 months – including those relating to education, diet diversity and access to nutritious food.
 - Provide support for at-home fortification programs where access to nutritious food is limited.
- 2. Work with all sectors – agriculture, business, education, government, health, social protection, and water, sanitation and hygiene – to adopt programs and strengthen policies that foster early childhood nutrition.**
 - Coordinate with partners across sectors to support efforts that directly improve nutrition – such as support for breastfeeding and ensuring access to essential vitamins and minerals – in order to drive progress and deliver results.
 - Support efforts that have a broader influence on nutrition – such as improving farming practices to increase the availability of nutrient-rich crops.

Did you know?

- Investments in improved nutrition can boost national GDP (Gross Domestic Product) by 3 percent annually.ⁱ
- Every \$1 invested in nutrition can have a \$30 return on investment.ⁱⁱ
- Supporting nutrition-focused policies and programs helps advance progress toward Millennium Development Goals #1 (eradicate extreme poverty and hunger), #4 (reduce child mortality) and #5 (improve maternal health).

The Power of Nutrition

Why is infant and young child nutrition important?

Optimal nutrition from pregnancy through a child's second birthday is necessary for proper brain development and physical growth. This time period is a unique 1,000 day window of opportunity that can give children a healthy start in life. Missing this opportunity means that a child will never grow to meet his or her full potential. Well-nourished children are better able to learn in school, have higher IQs and earn higher wages as adults, which allows them to contribute more to the economic and social development of their family and nation.

Optimal nutrition also supports the body's immune response, increasing tenfold the ability to fight infections and diseasesⁱⁱⁱ – including diarrhea, pneumonia and malaria, which are among the leading causes of death in young children. In fact, proper nutrition can prevent 1 in 5 deaths of children under age 5.^{iv}

Within the 1,000 day window for healthy infant and young child nutrition, there are 4 phases:

- **Phase 1:** A mother's pregnancy
- **Phase 2:** Within one hour of birth
- **Phase 3:** Birth to 6 months old
- **Phase 4:** 6 to 24 months old

The 4 Phases of Healthy Infant and Young Child Nutrition

Phase 1: Pregnancy

Proper nutrition before and during a mother's pregnancy is critical for her health and the health of her child. In addition to regular antenatal care visits, it is important that a woman receives the nourishment she needs, by:

- Eating a variety of healthy foods to ensure adequate nutrition;
- Increasing the amount of food consumed;
- Eating iron-rich foods such as red meat, fish, eggs, whole grain cereals and breads, and green leafy vegetables to combat iron deficiency and anemia;
- Eating fruits, vegetables and beans to increase fiber intake; and
- Drinking water regularly.



Phase 2: Within one hour of birth

Newborns should be breastfed within one hour of birth to ensure the infant receives colostrum, also known as the “first milk.” Colostrum is considered to be the baby’s first immunization because it contains high levels of vitamin A, antibodies and other protective factors. Colostrum is clean and pure and protects against infection. Breastfeeding during the first hour after birth, especially if accompanied by maternal-infant skin-to-skin contact, stabilizes the baby’s temperature, respiratory rate and blood sugar level.

Studies in Nepal and Ghana suggest that initiation of breastfeeding within the first hour of birth could prevent 19-22 percent of neonatal deaths.^{v,vi} Yet, only 39 percent of newborns in developing countries are breastfed within one hour of birth.^{vii}



Phase 3: Birth to 6 months old

From birth to 6 months of age, babies should exclusively receive breastmilk and not any other food, formula or liquids – not even water. In addition to boosting a baby’s immune system and providing essential nutrients to support growth, exclusive breastfeeding has health benefits for mothers, including a reduced risk of fatal postpartum hemorrhage and premenopausal breast and ovarian cancer. Additionally, frequent and exclusive breastfeeding can help delay the return of a woman’s fertility and protect her against anemia by conserving iron.



Breastmilk is a hygienic source of food with the right amount of energy, protein, fat, vitamins and other nutrients needed in the baby’s first 6 months. Exclusively breastfed infants under 6 months old do not need additional fluids or water, even in countries with extremely high temperatures and low humidity. Offering water or other liquids before 6 months of age reduces breastmilk intake, interferes with full absorption of nutrients found in breastmilk and increases the risk of illness from contaminated water and feeding bottles.

Exclusive breastfeeding is the single most effective intervention for preventing child deaths, yet less than 40 percent of infants under 6 months old receive the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding.^{viii} Infants under 2 months old who are not breastfed are six times more likely to die from diarrhea or acute respiratory infections than those who are breastfed.^{ix}

Phase 4: 6 to 24 months

Starting at 6 months of age, breastmilk alone is no longer sufficient to meet the nutritional requirements of an infant. Therefore, while continuing to breastfeed, mothers should introduce other liquids and solid/semi-solid foods into the baby's daily diet to complement breastfeeds. A combination of breastmilk and complementary foods is a critical feeding practice to further a child's physical growth and brain development.



- Beginning at 6 months, babies should be fed solid/semi-solid foods two to three times a day, increasing frequency and portions as the child gets older.
- Young children need nutrients from a variety of foods – especially animal source foods (e.g., eggs, meat and fish), fruits and vegetables.
- Where access to diverse nutritious food is limited, fortified foods and nutrient supplements can help ensure intake of essential vitamins and minerals.

Children who are not properly nourished during this critical period miss the opportunity to reach their full physical and cognitive growth potential, are more susceptible to rapid weight gain (which raises the risk of complications resulting from obesity) and face higher risk of chronic disease as adults.

ⁱ S. Horton, M. Shekar, C. McDonald, A. Mahal and J.K. Brooks. [Scaling Up Nutrition: What Will It Cost?](#) World Bank, 2009.

ⁱⁱ J. Hoddinott, M. Rosegrant, and M. Torero. [A Challenge Paper on Hunger and Malnutrition: The Summary](#). Copenhagen Consensus Center, 2012

ⁱⁱⁱ ["Nutrition in the First 1,000 Days State of the World's Mothers 2012."](#) Save the Children. 2012.

^{iv} Ibid.

^v K.M. Edmond, C. Zandoh, M.A. Quigley, S. Amenga-Etego, S. Owusu-Agyei, B.R. Kirkwood. Delayed breastfeeding initiation increases risk of neonatal mortality. *Pediatrics*. 2006 Mar; 117(3):e380-6.

^{vi} L.C. Mullany, J. Katz, Y.M. Li, S.K. Khatry, S.C. LeClerq, G.L. Darmstadt, et al. Breast-feeding patterns, time to initiation, and mortality risk among newborns in southern Nepal. *J Nutr*. 2008 Mar; 138(3):599-603.

^{vii} United Nations Children's Fund. [Tracking Progress on Child and Maternal Nutrition](#). New York: UNICEF, 2009. Accessed December 1, 2009.

^{viii} Ibid.

^{ix} WHO Collaborative Study Team on the Role of Breastfeeding on the Prevention of Infant Mortality. "Effect of Breastfeeding on Infant and Child Mortality Due to Infectious Diseases in Less Developed Countries: A Pooled Analysis." *The Lancet*. Vol. 355, Issue 9202. February 5, 2000. pp. 451–455.

Key Resources

View the [Power of Nutrition animated video](#) and download the [Power of Nutrition infographic](#)

Infant and young child nutrition overview

- [Alive & Thrive](#)
- [Nutrition and brain development in early life](#) (*Alive & Thrive*)
- [State of the World's Mothers 2012: Nutrition in the First 1,000 Days](#) (*Save the Children*)
- [Maternal, infant and young child nutrition: draft comprehensive implementation plan](#) (*World Health Organization*)
- [Copenhagen Consensus Challenge Paper: Hunger and Malnutrition](#) (*Copenhagen Consensus Center*)
- [A Life Free From Hunger: Tackling Child Malnutrition](#) (*Save the Children*)
- [Scaling Up Nutrition: A Framework for Action](#) (*SUN Movement*)
- [The Lancet Series on Maternal and Child Undernutrition](#) (*The Lancet*)
- [The International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes: Frequently Asked Questions](#) (*World Health Organization*)
- [Progress for Children: A Report Card on Nutrition](#) (*UNICEF*)

Maternal nutrition

- [Essential fats for mothers and infants: Another dimension of dietary quality](#) (*Alive & Thrive*)

Birth to 6 months

- [Impact of early initiation of exclusive breastfeeding on newborn deaths](#) (*Alive & Thrive*)
- [Nutrition Adequacy of Exclusive Breastfeeding for the Term Infant During the First Six Months of Life](#) (*World Health Organization*)

6 to 24 months

- [Early childhood growth: how do nutrition and infection interact?](#) (*Alive & Thrive*)
- [Why stunting matters](#) (*Alive & Thrive*)
- [Strengthening action to improve feeding of infants and young children 6-23 months of age in nutrition and child health](#) (*World Health Organization*)