

Healthy Eating for Children

Eating the right types of food is essential for young children. As leaders, our goal is to help parents know what types of foods are needed and find ways to provide them.

This document presents simple ways to improve nutrition. It addresses common causes of malnutrition and does not intend to explain all nutritional needs in detail.



KEY POINTS

- **The first five years of a child’s life are the most important** for growth and brain development. A variety of foods is needed to support the child’s rapid growth. Good nutrition in these early years helps develop a strong foundation and avoid lifelong health problems.
- **The best food for babies is breastmilk.** There are many advantages to breastfeeding (if possible) for the first one to two years. (See the “Breastfeeding” unit leader guide.) Other foods should be added after six months.
- **Many children don’t get enough fruits, vegetables, and protein foods.** One of the best ways to improve children’s health is to feed them more of these foods. Parents can help by providing them at least once a day. When possible, there should be a protein food and a fruit or vegetable at every meal.

Fruits and vegetables , such as bananas, oranges, carrots, leafy greens	To support many body functions and prevent disease
Protein foods , such as fish, nuts, eggs, poultry, meat, dry beans	To help the body grow and repair itself
Grains and starches , such as rice, noodles, bread, potatoes (sometimes called “main foods”)	To provide energy

- **Children should not eat a lot of salty or sugary foods and packaged snacks.** A good diet is low in salt and sugar.
- **Certified specialists can help.** Nutrition screening events can identify any children who have inadequate nutrition (malnutrition). A doctor or certified nutritionist can tell a child’s nutrition status by measuring height and weight. If a child is not well-nourished, the specialist can advise on how to help the child recover. If adequate foods are not available, the specialist may recommend supplements.

Share the “Healthy Eating for Children” handout with members.



Questions to Prayerfully Consider

- Who in our area may need our support to provide nutritious foods for children?
- What would help most to improve the nutrition of our members?
- What community or Church resources are available?



Inspiration from the Scriptures

The Word of Wisdom counsels us to eat a variety of nutritious foods that God has provided. Those who follow these truths are promised special blessings of health, energy, wisdom, and treasures of knowledge (see Doctrine and Covenants 89).

THINGS WE CAN DO

Consider these ideas and others as you counsel together and pray for guidance.

Leaders

- **Address the immediate need** if a family cannot provide needed foods for a malnourished child. Also plan how to help the family increase their self-reliance.
- **Prayerfully choose people who can best minister** to families with a malnourished child.
- **If your stake organizes a nutrition screening for children**, encourage families to attend and help them come if needed.
- **Locate health clinics in the community** that could assess and treat malnutrition.
- **Encourage and support breastfeeding.** See the “Breastfeeding” unit leader guide.
- **The Relief Society and elders quorum may:**
 - Hold a recipe exchange.
 - Have an activity preparing fruits, vegetables, and protein foods in new ways. Show how to make low-cost nutritious meals.
 - Teach about planning ahead to have nutritious foods in the home.
 - Use vegetables, fruits, or protein foods for refreshments at Church activities.
- **Prepare a list of local foods** that belong in each of these categories: fruits and vegetables, protein foods, and grains and starches. Or use your country’s published dietary guidelines. Provide this information to families as needed.
- **Explore ways gardening could be used** in your area. See the “Gardening” unit leader guide.

Ministering Brothers and Sisters

If you are helping a family with a malnourished child:

- **Counsel with the Relief Society or elders quorum about ways you can help.** For example, you may be able to help the family connect with resources.
- **Let the family take the lead in their plans.** Have a conversation about what they would like to do. Help them think of actions to take. Focus on small steps, and celebrate success.
- **Help the family learn about the types of food children need.**
- **Be understanding and not judgmental.** Listen to understand the challenges parents may have in trying to provide more nutritious foods. Encourage them in all their efforts. Help them have hope.
- **Pray with them and for their children by name.**

LEARN MORE

Learn more about healthy eating and other ways to improve child nutrition: ChildNutrition.ChurchofJesusChrist.org

