



EARLY INCLUSION IN NUTRITION

Nutrition is fundamental for children to grow, develop, and thrive. Together with other factors like protection and early education, nutrition is critical for children's development. It also has benefits for families, communities, and economies. Each dollar invested in reducing stunting generates a return of up to USD \$184, and nutrition is instrumental to delivering at least 12 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.ⁱ

At least 291 million children and youth around the world have a disability.ⁱⁱ Children with disabilities are three times as likely to be malnourished as children without disabilities, and twice as likely to die from malnutrition.ⁱⁱⁱ They are 34% more likely to be stunted, 25% more likely to be wasted, and 25% less likely to receive early stimulation.^{iv} Up to 85 percent of children with disabilities experience feeding difficulties, which can lead to respiratory illnesses and undernutrition.^v

Children with disabilities are often excluded from public health programs, including nutrition and health services. They are also more likely to lose family care or be placed into institutions. Children in institutions face increased risks of malnutrition due to factors like poor diets, unsafe feeding practices, and a lack of nurturing care.^{vi}

EVERY CHILD'S RIGHT TO HEALTH AND FAMILY

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, and the 2019 UNGA Resolution on the Rights of the Child, affirm every child's right to family life. They also affirm that every child has the right to health, including appropriate health services that promote dignity, self-reliance, and participation. The CRC emphasizes that these rights apply to all children, including children without family care and children with disabilities.

SOLUTIONS TOWARDS EQUITY

Many of the nutritional issues facing children with disabilities have existing solutions that are simply not reaching them. These key actions can help to ensure that children with disabilities have the nutrition they need to grow and thrive.



Support families and caregivers: Caregivers have the power to transform nutrition and feeding. Simple techniques and inclusive health services can allow families, caregivers, and professionals to transform nutrition and feeding.

Make nutrition and early child development programs inclusive: When programs do not intentionally include children with disabilities, they unintentionally exclude them. Programs focusing on nutrition, family care, and early child development must take specific steps and accountability measures to include children with disabilities.

Improve data and research: All nutrition research should disaggregate data by disability; and governments and partners should monitor progress towards nutrition goals through disability-disaggregated nutrition data.

Develop inclusive policies: Children with disabilities must be prioritized in nutrition, early child development, and disability policies. This should include specific strategies to meet their nutrition and feeding needs, funding for inclusion, and clear accountability measures to hold decision makers accountable.

Learn More: www.spoonfoundation.org

ⁱ Scaling up nutrition, n.d. Nutrition and the Sustainable Development Goals. Available:

<https://scalingupnutrition.org/nutrition/nutrition-and-the-sustainable-development-goals/>

ⁱⁱ Olusanya B.O., et al. Global Burden of Childhood Epilepsy, Intellectual Disability, and Sensory Impairments. *Pediatrics*. 2020 Jul;146(1):e20192623. doi: 10.1542/peds.2019-2623. Epub 2020 Jun 17. PMID: 32554521.

ⁱⁱⁱ Kuper, H., & Heydt, P. 2019. The Missing Billion: Access to health services for 1 billion people with disabilities. Available: <https://www.lshtm.ac.uk/TheMissingBillion>

^{iv} UNICEF, 2022. Seen, Counted, Included: Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities. Available: <https://data.unicef.org/resources/children-with-disabilities-report-2021/>

^v Calis, E. A., et al. 2008. Dysphagia in children with severe generalized cerebral palsy and intellectual disability. *Developmental Medicine & Child Neurology*, 50(8), 625–630.

^{vi} van Ijzendoorn, et al. 2020. Institutionalisation and deinstitutionalization of children 1: a systemic and integrative review of evidence regarding effects on development. *Lancet*, 7 (8), 703-720. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(19\)30399-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(19)30399-2)