

# CHILDHOOD UNDERNUTRITION

## What is Childhood Undernutrition?

- Also commonly known as malnutrition
- Defined as not having enough calories, protein, vitamins, or minerals to maintain a healthy body
- Approximately 161 million children under five are undernourished. Most of these children live in developing countries
- The main cause of childhood undernutrition is poverty. Hunger contributes to poverty, which creates a vicious cycle between poverty, hunger, and undernutrition

## Effects and Prevention of Childhood Undernutrition

### Effects:

- Stunted growth and development
- Weakened immune system so more susceptible to infections
- Increased mortality or death

### Preventing Undernutrition:

- Encourage mothers to breastfeed, if possible
- Increase access to food services and improve food security
- Improve water supply, sanitation, and hygiene
- Fortify everyday foods with vitamins and minerals

## Effects on Communication Problems

- Undernutrition before age two leads to:
- Decreased brain development
- Reduction in cognitive development (reduced attention, memory, learning)
- Deficits in language-decreased vocabulary, grammatical errors, poor social skills (taking turns, sharing, making eye contact)
- Behavioral problems (more distractible, irritable, more fatigued)



UA SCIENCE

Speech, Language,  
& Hearing Sciences

# CHILDHOOD UNDERNUTRITION

## Role of the Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP)

- Serve as part of an integrated team, including pediatricians, dieticians, social workers, etc.
- Administer individualized, evidence-based speech and language services
  - Note: For speech-language therapy to be as effective as possible, a child's nutrition should first be improved. These dietary recommendations should be provided a a pediatrician or dietician
- Suggest strategies caregivers can use to assist their child's communication and language development
- Provide swallowing and feeding support if needed

## Classroom Modifications and Communication Strategies

- Allow snacks in the classroom
- Use simple, and grammatically correct sentences (e.g. "The dog is barking")
- Give clear but simple directions while using point gestures while giving simple directions (e.g. "Sit here." "Stand there.")
- Keep distractions to a minimum (e.g. seat children away from toys, windows, and doors, etc.)
- Model or demonstrate how to take turns and share toys

For more information, please visit:

<http://www.healthofchildren.com/M/Malnutrition.html>

<http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/179316.php>



UA SCIENCE

Speech, Language,  
& Hearing Sciences