



Empowering Children. Supporting Families. Building Brighter Futures.

Resource 054 | Growth and nutrition

Nutritional deficiencies in children

What it means

Nutritional deficiencies occur when a child does not have enough of particular nutrients for healthy body and brain function. Examples include deficiencies of iron, vitamin D, vitamin B12, iodine, or other micronutrients. Effects vary by the nutrient, severity, duration, and the child's overall health. [1]

Causes and risk factors

Restricted intake, inadequate food access, feeding disorders, difficulties absorbing nutrients, increased requirements, or some medical conditions can contribute. Prematurity can increase particular needs. A varied-looking diet or normal body weight does not always establish nutritional adequacy. [1,2]

General family education. A concern deserves assessment, but this guide does not diagnose a child or prescribe treatment.



Signs and everyday impact

Signs may include poor growth, fatigue, pallor, bone or muscle concerns, developmental changes, or other symptoms depending on the deficiency. Some children have no obvious signs. These symptoms have many possible causes and should not be used to select supplements without assessment. [1,2]

Assessment and diagnosis

A clinician and dietitian review diet, growth, feeding, health, and relevant risk factors. Targeted blood tests may assess specific deficiencies; broad panels are not automatically necessary for every developmental concern. Test interpretation should consider age, illness, and the suspected nutrient problem. [1,2]

Treatment and therapy

Treatment provides the deficient nutrient in a suitable form and treats the reason it became low. It may include dietary support, prescribed supplements, feeding therapy, or medical treatment for absorption or illness. Dose, duration, interactions, and monitoring vary. More vitamins are not necessarily better, and excessive intake can be harmful. [1,2,3]

Support at home

Follow the child's prescribed nutrition plan, keep supplements out of reach, and bring product labels to visits so doses are not duplicated. Seek help with restricted foods or affordability. Do not start restrictive diets or high-dose supplements marketed as developmental treatments.

When to seek help

Severe weakness, neurological changes, inability to feed, dehydration, or significant illness needs prompt medical assessment; reduced consciousness or breathing difficulty is an emergency.

Questions for your care team

- Which deficiency is suspected and what evidence supports it?
- What is the likely cause and appropriate treatment?
- How will response and safe stopping or maintenance be monitored?



Podcast preparation

Use this outline to develop a later podcast script.

Suggested opening

Welcome to Mariel Early Intervention. Today we discuss nutritional deficiencies in children. Nutritional deficiencies occur when a child does not have enough of particular nutrients for healthy body and brain function. This is general education; each child needs individualized care.

Opening: Define the topic and its developmental context.

Understanding: Explain causes and signs without inviting self-diagnosis.

Assessment: Describe evaluation and distinguish screening from diagnosis.

Support: Discuss treatment, therapy, and practical family supports.

Closing: Explain urgent signs and one clear next step.

Misconception to address: A supplement does not treat every developmental delay, and nutrient needs should be established rather than guessed.

Before recording: update clinical references and local service details, arrange clinical review, and use fully consented or fictional examples.

Terms in plain language

- Micronutrient: a vitamin or mineral needed in small amounts.
- Absorption: taking nutrients from the gut into the body.
- Supplement: a product supplying additional nutrients.

Sources and further reading

Sources accessed 3 October 2026. Numbered references support the clinical overview. Treatment availability and referral routes vary by country.

[1] WHO guideline on the prevention and management of wasting and nutritional oedema (acute malnutrition) in infants and children under 5 years

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240082830>

[2] Anemia in Children and Teens: Parent FAQs

https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/chronic/Pages/Anemia-and-Your-Child.aspx?alt_id=c6bbd

[3] Pediatric Feeding and Swallowing

<https://www.asha.org/practice-portal/clinical-topics/pediatric-feeding-and-swallowing/>