

Is Your Child Malnourished?

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Malnutrition is often associated with the image of a thin, forlorn child with a distended belly. Another kind of malnutrition, with high and empty calories, runs rampant in America, among people who never experienced deprivation.

What is high or empty calorie malnutrition?

A child can gain weight eating excessive calories consisting only of bread and french fries, missing the nutrients needed for optimal neurological development. During critical brain development periods, such a diet can cause permanent damage due to lack of essential vitamin and mineral building blocks.

Picky eaters may eat too little food or suffer from empty calorie malnutrition by eating junk foods with excess calories but few nutrients. If their intake is poor over a long period, a type of anorexia or growth hormone deficiency can develop. Insufficient zinc, vitamin B1 and other nutrients cause decreased taste acuity and poor appetite.

Is your child malnourished?

Does he/she look malnourished? Visual diagnosis, a dying art, tells us that kids in good nutritional shape are vibrant and have good coloring.

Professionals often tell concerned parents not to worry as long as a pale, lethargic fussy eater is gaining weight. These well-meaning professionals often view parents as overly anxious or poor disciplinarians. Trust your instincts. Children who do not look healthy, or eat a diet that you could not thrive on, are probably malnourished.

Are they eating fresh fruits and vegetables? Yes, children can and should eat vegetables. The fact that many will not, does not make it acceptable. Many of the anti-oxidants that support neurological health also protect us from chronic illness, and are found in fresh produce. Poorly nourished children often cannot taste the flavors of fruits and vegetables, which are subtle when compared to artificially enhanced, heavily salted or sweetened packaged foods.

What can I do to help my child?

Poor eating and malnutrition become a vicious cycle. Malnutrition impairs taste and appetite and impaired taste and appetite lower one's interest in good food. To break this cycle, close the gap between what is needed and what is actually eaten by using nutritional supplements. While whole foods are better, supplements can provide the missing link in a child's development while you are working on the behavior.

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