

## NUTRITION FOR CHILDREN'S GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

An adequate supply of nutrients is an important prerequisite for the well being of children. Food and nutrients help to form strong teeth and bones, muscles and a healthy body, and a good diet can help to protect children against illness now and in the future. Consequently, optimum nutrition and good feeding of infants and young children are amongst the most important determinants of their health, growth and development, and one of the many factors influencing cognitive development. Childhood is characterized by the time of rapid growth and changes in body composition so it is crucial that children are provided with optimal quantities of carbohydrates, proteins, fats and essential vitamins and minerals for their healthy growth and development.

The vitamins and minerals most relevant to the health of children and their key benefits are:

- **Vitamin A:** necessary for the correct development of vision and the immune system, and many other physiological processes including taste, hearing and growth.
- **B Vitamins:** play a fundamental role in the growth of children as well as their correct sustenance and development.
- **Vitamin C:** key to the optimum functioning of the immune system, contains antioxidant properties and plays a support role in the absorption of iron.
- **Vitamin D:** plays an essential role in metabolizing calcium.
- **Iron:** essential for blood formation, development of the immune system and correct mental and psycho-motor development.
- **Zinc:** required for the normal development and maintenance of the immune system. Adequate zinc helps the body resist infection (even a mild deficiency can lead to increased risk of infection.)
- **Calcium:** has an essential function in the composition of bones and teeth.

A varied, balanced diet and a healthy lifestyle are important. No product should be used as a substitute for a balanced diet.

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