

# 1,000 Days that Decide Everything: Child Malnutrition and What the World Can Do

What our kids should eat has been the subject of every pediatrician's visit, parenting class, and talk show in recent memory. The perfect answer is still up for debate, but in the meantime we've collectively, consistently failed to secure even the most basic nutrition for many of the world's most vulnerable children.

Ensuring kids get a healthy start to life is about more than food aid or adding calories to their diet. It's about making sure pregnant women, infants, and toddlers have access to the essential nutrition – not just the calories – they need. Later this year, world leaders will come together to commit to doing a better job at just that.

Childhood malnutrition goes hand-in-hand with poverty globally: it is both a devastating consequence and a key driver of poverty. Its effects often follow a child throughout her lifetime – from her basic health to how far she's likely to get in school to how much she'll earn. The consequences of early malnutrition are devastating and permanent, but they are also entirely preventable.

The right early nutrition is the most basic foundation for children and communities to thrive. This begins in the womb, when a pregnant woman getting iron, folic acid, and other essential nutrients can help make sure babies are born healthy and at the right weight. It continues in infancy, when improved breastfeeding practices have the potential to save nearly a million lives every year. And then for toddlers, a nutritious diet is essential for healthy growth and establishing lifelong nutrition habits.

In 2013 at the Nutrition for Growth summit, world leaders committed over [\\$4 billion](#) in pledges toward high-impact nutrition work globally – a big step forward, but still far short of the need. They will regather this year for a second Nutrition for Growth summit, where they have a chance to step up with new commitments.

The U.S. – like so many of its global peers – has far more it can and should do. President Obama should commit to setting us on a new path in our support for childhood nutrition, committing at least \$500 million to the cause during his last year in office. There is a generation of children around the world counting on our leaders to do what it takes to help make the unnecessary scourge of malnutrition a thing of the past. We cannot afford to let them down.

# THE POWER OF THE FIRST 1,000 DAYS

The right nutrition in the 1,000 days between a woman's pregnancy and her child's second birthday builds the foundation for a child's ability to grow, learn and thrive.

**Pregnancy:** Pre-pregnancy to birth

Babies developing in the womb draw all of their nutrients from their mother. If mom lacks key nutrients, so will her baby, putting the child's future health and development at risk.

**Infancy:** Birth to 6 months

Breast milk is superfood for babies. Not only is it the best nutrition an infant can get, but it also serves as the first immunization against illness and disease.

**Toddlerhood:** 6 months to 2 years

Nutrients from a variety of healthy foods are an essential complement to breast milk to ensure healthy growth and brain development.

The impact of good nutrition early in life can reach far into the future. Children who get the right nutrition in their first 1,000 days:

ARE 10x MORE likely to overcome the most life-threatening childhood diseases<sup>1</sup>



COMPLETE 4.6 more grades of school<sup>2</sup>



Go on to earn 21% more in wages as adults<sup>3</sup>



Are more likely as adults to have healthier families<sup>4</sup>



#### SOURCES

1. Save the Children, Nutrition in the First 1,000 Days: State of the World's Mothers 2012.
2. Hoddinott, J. et al "Adult consequences of growth failure in early childhood." American Society for Nutrition, 2013.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.



www.thousanddays.org

Infographic provided courtesy of 1,000 Days, the leading nonprofit organization working in the U.S. and around the world to improve nutrition and ensure women and children have the healthiest first 1,000 days.

## How Just 1,000 Days Decide Everything

About [one out of three](#) people globally are malnourished, suffering from either undernutrition, obesity, deficiencies in essential vitamins and minerals, or some combination of the three. But it is children who suffer most. Almost [half](#) of all early childhood deaths are linked to some form of malnutrition. And a staggering [one out of every four](#) children globally is stunted – failing to grow well because as babies and young children they didn't get the nutrients needed to thrive. Stunting happens in a child's earliest days and months, but its consequences last a lifetime.

Proper nutrition during the window starting with a woman's pregnancy and ending with a child's second birthday sets children on a path toward reaching their full potential. These "[1,000 days](#)" have a profound impact on a child's life, from their brain development to their IQ to their immune system to their growth. During pregnancy, infancy, and early childhood, the nutrition a child

receives has an irreversible effect – for good or for bad. Once this essential window for physical and cognitive development closes for an individual child, it does not reopen.

[Kids with proper nutrition](#) in the first 1,000 days are far more likely to overcome the most common childhood illnesses. They go farther in school. They earn an average of 20% more over the course of their lifetimes. They are more than 30% more likely to move out of poverty. And they're more likely and able to raise healthy families of their own.

What happens in those first 1,000 days starts either a vicious or a virtuous cycle. That's why what world leaders commit to doing on nutrition now will impact the world for years to come.

## What World Leaders Can Do This Year

No single event in the foreseeable future will play a bigger role in global nutrition than the “Nutrition for Growth” summit later this year. World leaders will gather to make specific financial and policy commitments to childhood nutrition, and their level of ambition in those commitments can change the trajectory of global childhood malnutrition – for better or for worse.

Investment and focus has long lagged far behind the opportunity on nutrition. World leaders – the U.S. included – have woefully underinvested in critical nutrition programs for years, collectively failing millions of the world's most vulnerable children. A smart response to the enormous challenge of malnutrition is about more than planting crops: it's about investing in the proven, high-impact strategies for a child's first 1,000 days that pay off over a lifetime.

President Obama now has a chance to show real leadership, stepping up to commit \$500 million to nutrition in the final year of his Administration, setting this country and the next Administration on a new path to supporting healthier futures all around the world.

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