



NUTRITIONAL ADVICE FOR CHILDREN AT DIFFERENT DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES

The significance of proper nutrition

Proper nutrition is essential for a child's growth, brain development, immunity and overall well-being. As children grow, their nutritional needs change, and understanding these stages is crucial as it enables parents to make informed food choices to ensure healthy development. Read on to learn about appropriate nutrition at different stages of a child's development.

Infancy (0–6 months)

During the first six months, exclusive breastfeeding is recommended, as it provides ideal nutrition, antibodies and enzymes that protect against infections. Breast milk supports brain development and strengthens immunity. If breastfeeding is not possible, iron-fortified infant formula is a suitable alternative under medical guidance. At this stage, no additional foods or water are required.

Infancy (6–12 months)

From six months onward, complementary feeding should begin alongside continued breastfeeding. Soft, mashed foods such as pureed fruits, vegetables, cereals, lentils and well-cooked rice can be introduced gradually. Iron-rich foods like mashed pulses and fortified cereals are especially important to prevent anaemia. Foods should be introduced one at a time to monitor allergies.

Toddler Stage (1–3 years)

Toddlers need energy-dense and nutrient-rich foods to support rapid growth and increasing activity levels. Their diet should include a balance of carbohydrates,



proteins, healthy fats, vitamins and minerals. Whole grains, fruits, vegetables, dairy products, eggs, pulses and lean meats should be included in small, frequent meals.

Preschool and Early School Age (4–8 years)

At this stage, children require balanced meals to support physical growth, cognitive development and immunity. Calcium and vitamin D are crucial for bone development, while iron supports learning and concentration. Limiting junk food and sugary drinks is important to prevent obesity and dental problems.

Older Children and Adolescents (9–18 years)

As children approach adolescence, nutritional needs increase due to growth spurts and hormonal changes. Protein, calcium, iron and energy intake should be adequate to support muscle and bone development. Encouraging regular meals, healthy snacks and hydration is vital.

It is important to remember that age-appropriate nutrition plays a key role in a child's physical and mental development. A balanced, varied diet at every stage ensures a healthy future.