

MATERNAL NUTRITION

USAID's investments seek to protect nutrition throughout the lifecycle to ensure that all women and children are well-nourished and able to live healthy and productive lives.



Photo: Kate Holt / USAID

PREVENTING MALNUTRITION IN WOMEN AND GIRLS

Women and girls have unique nutritional requirements throughout the life cycle—especially during adolescence, before and during pregnancy, and while breastfeeding. In particular, the nutritional vulnerability of mothers is the greatest during the 1,000 days between pregnancy and a child's second birthday, which is a critical period of growth and development.

In many countries around the world, the nutritional status of women is unacceptably poor. Far too many women cannot access the nutrition services they need for optimal health for themselves and their children. Additionally, many women cannot access a nutritious diet because of the high cost of nutrient-rich foods like fresh fruits and vegetables, dairy, eggs, poultry, fish, and meat.



Maternal malnutrition **INCREASES THE RISK OF WOMEN DYING** from preeclampsia and postpartum hemorrhage



Every year, maternal malnutrition contributes to **800,000 NEWBORN DEATHS**



Deficiencies in folate early in pregnancy can lead to **NEURAL TUBE DEFECTS IN INFANTS**, which are often fatal



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THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORTING NUTRITION ACROSS THE LIFE COURSE

Improving women's and girls' diets, access to nutrition services, and nutrition counseling – before and during pregnancy and while breastfeeding – is critical to preventing malnutrition.

Before Pregnancy

To ensure the nutritional health and well-being of both mom and baby, good nutrition is critical before pregnancy. Adolescent girls in particular are in a period of enhanced growth and have increased requirements for good nutrition.

USAID supports women and girls to achieve the best possible nutrition by increasing access to high quality nutrition services and safe, affordable, nutritious foods.

During Pregnancy

When a woman's nutritional status is compromised there may be harmful consequences for both the mother and child. During pregnancy, poor diets lacking in key ingredients like iodine, iron, folate, calcium, and zinc can cause anemia, preeclampsia, and hemorrhage in mothers, and neural tube defects in infants.

USAID promotes improved access to nutrient-rich diets, and provides micronutrient supplementation during pregnancy in order to prevent delivery complications and adverse birth outcomes.

While Breastfeeding

Poor maternal nutrition makes it more challenging for mothers to replenish their nutrient stores and meet additional dietary needs to provide their newborn with optimal nutrition.

Following childbirth, USAID provides mothers and family members with counseling on the importance of continuing an adequate, nutritious diet to support her health and the child's lifelong growth and development.

How Does USAID Support Maternal Nutrition?



Counseling women and their families to promote the consumption of a nutritious diet, including fruits and vegetables, dairy, eggs, poultry, fish, and meat before, during, and after pregnancy to support the health of the mother and baby.



Improving the measurement of maternal diets to enable countries and donors to better monitor and evaluate progress towards maternal nutrition goals.



Advancing food systems transformation to promote food fortification and increase access to safe, affordable foods that provide essential nutrition for women and girls.



Protecting, promoting, and advocating good nutrition for a mother's nutritional status in emergency situations.



Ensuring women's and girls' access to education, income, and later marriage to give women and girls more opportunities to generate an income to produce better health and nutrition outcomes.

► **Learn more at**
USAID.gov/nutrition

1 Bhutta, Z. A. et al. (2013). Evidence-based interventions for improvement of maternal and child nutrition: what can be done and at what cost? *The Lancet* 382(9890), 452–477. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(13\)60996-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(13)60996-4)

2 USAID (2015). Multi-Sectoral Nutrition Strategy 2014-2025: Technical Guidance Brief. Maternal Nutrition for Women and Girls. <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1864/maternal-nutrition-for-girls-women-508-3.pdf>



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