



WHO guideline for complementary feeding of infants and young children 6–23 months of age

This is a summary of the following report: WHO (2023) WHO Guideline for complementary feeding of infants and young children 6–23 months of age.

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240081864>

The World Health Organization (WHO) has recently released a comprehensive guideline for the complementary feeding of infants and young children aged 6–23 months. Acknowledging the importance of appropriate complementary feeding in the early stages of life, this guideline provides 7 evidence-based recommendations to optimise the nutrition and health of this critical age group, whether they are breastfed or not.

First, the guideline stresses the importance of initiating complementary feeding for infants aged 6 months while continuing breastfeeding for up to 2 years or beyond. To achieve this, all breastfeeding women will require an enabling and supportive environment.

“Exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months remains a crucial recommendation.”

Second, it recommends that, for infants aged 6–11 months who are fed milks other than breastmilk, either milk formula or animal milk is appropriate. For young children aged 12–23 months, animal milk should be used and low-up formulas are not recommended.

Third, the appropriate age for introduction of complementary foods is six months, while continuing to breastfeed, and mothers who are concerned about the adequacy of breast milk alone could benefit from lactation support.

Fourth, daily consumption of animal-source foods – meat, fish, or eggs – is recommended. Moreover, when animal-source foods were excluded from infant and young child diets for children aged six to eight months, nutrient needs in terms of iron, zinc, and vitamin B12 could not be met. Additionally, fruits and vegetables should be included in the daily diet. Frequent consumption of pulses, nuts, and seeds is also encouraged, especially where meat, fish, eggs, and vegetables are limited. The guideline underscores the importance of nutrient-dense foods over less nutritious starchy staple foods. Diversification of the diet is a key aspect of feeding to meet the nutritional needs of the growing child.

Fifth, infants and young children should avoid unhealthy foods and beverages high in sugar, salt, trans fats, and non-sugar sweeteners, including sugar-sweetened beverages. Fruit juices should also be limited. Broad policy actions – including in regard to agriculture, front-of-package

labelling, and marketing practices – are essential, and caregivers require counselling on the harms of unhealthy foods and beverages.

Sixth, in contexts where diverse, nutrient-rich complementary foods are not accessible, nutrient supplements and fortified food products can address gaps in children’s nutrition. Multiple micronutrient powders, fortification of commercial cereals, and small-quantity lipid-based nutrient supplements are options, with guidance emphasising their supplementary nature – i.e., these products are not substitutes for a diverse, minimally processed diet. The guideline holds back from recommending fortified milk.

Seventh, the role of responsive feeding, through recognising and responding to the child’s hunger and feeding cues, is critical. This approach fosters a positive feeding environment, encouraging healthy eating habits, preventing overfeeding or underfeeding, and supporting cognitive, emotional, and social development.

To support the implementation of this guideline, WHO emphasises the need for education and awareness programmes targeting caregivers, healthcare professionals, and communities. Nevertheless, more studies with consistent research protocols across diverse regions and populations are needed. Most topics examined lacked robust, randomized controlled trials.

This guideline contributes to the global effort to improve child nutrition and support healthy growth and development. The guideline’s practical recommendations and adaptability to various contexts make it a valuable tool for healthcare providers, policymakers, and caregivers worldwide.

Climate action and nutrition: Pathways to impact

This is a summary of the following paper: FAO (2023) Climate action and nutrition – Pathways to impact. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc8415en>

Malnutrition and climate change are both pressing global issues, needing comprehensive interventions to address their multifaceted impacts on health, economies, and the environment. Malnutrition and climate change are interconnected due to the interdependence of climate, ecosystems, biodiversity, and human societies. Populations most vulnerable to malnutrition are also those most at risk from the negative effects of climate change. Addressing both through integrated action offers a singular solution to significant sustainable development obstacles.

“The impact of malnutrition in all its forms on the global economy is an estimated USD 3.5 trillion each year, and climate change is predicted to cost USD 178 trillion by 2070”

This paper focuses on the 4 core systems supporting the interconnection of climate and nutrition: agrifood, water, social protection, and health. Integrated action within these systems can positively impact various national priorities simulta-

neously, including climate change, nutrition, and sustainable development. For each system, the report describes the system’s importance in regard to good nutrition and summarises the evidence of the system’s interaction with climate change. The report then proposes integrated actions and highlights corresponding potential nutrition-relevant and climate-relevant outcomes alongside their key enablers. Text is supported by useful tables and diagrams illustrating the interlinkages.

Proposed integrated actions within agrifood systems include diversifying production, sustainable soil management, reducing food waste and loss, enabling local markets, practicing sustainable procurement, aligning policies for biodiversity–climate–water–nutrition benefits, and implementing dietary guidelines considering sustainability, with a focus on reducing gender inequalities.

For water systems, proposed integrated actions include holistic governance, stakeholder engagement, technology integration, reduced water consumption, updated water, sanitation, and hygiene policies addressing climate change, and gender-responsive water, sanitation, and hygiene.

Social protection systems need inclusive climate adaptation, which supports livelihoods, disaster strategies integrating food needs, and gender-transformative approaches.

Integrated actions within health systems include increased data availability and use, nutrition integration, reduced environmental impact, One Health approaches, gender mainstreaming in health systems’ climate response, and strengthened early warning systems.

For all systems, gaps remain in our understanding of key influencers and enablers within pathways of integrated action to impact. The report calls for the development of a comprehensive and strategic research agenda to address this. It also highlights the underlying need for peace and stability, given that conflict, civil unrest, and displacement increase vulnerability to malnutrition and exacerbate the negative impacts of climate change.

In conclusion, the report underscores the urgency of integrated action to address climate change and malnutrition. Through detailed response options and pathways, it advocates for more collaborative efforts, increased evidence, and a focus on sustainable development. Integrated policies and action are positioned as the key to achieving progress across diverse global priorities, stressing the interconnectedness of climate and nutrition in the pursuit of a healthier, more resilient world. The Initiative on Climate Action and Nutrition (I-CAN) launched in 2022 at COP27 is highlighted as a crucial global multisectoral multistakeholder collaboration to drive forward transformative action.