

**The right foods
– in quantity and
quality – fed often
from 6 to 24
months ensure
optimal growth
and development**



Why

do the right foods, in quantity and quality, fed often from 6 to 24 months ensure young children's optimal growth?

Young children need more and a greater variety of foods as they grow

- Children grow and develop quickly from 6 to 24 months of life, and need to eat sufficient amounts of age-appropriate complementary foods which are high in energy, protein and nutrients.
- Foods from different food groups such as grains, eggs, poultry, fish, meat, dairy products, fruits and vegetables provide children with a variety of nutrients that helps them grow strong and develop fully.

Young children benefit from being fed more often and in a responsive and active way

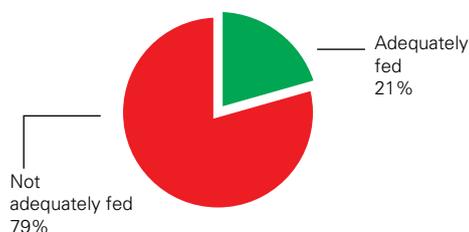
- Young children have very small stomachs and need to be given small feeds, high in nutrients and fed frequently during the day.
- Complementary feeding needs to be responsive – feeding infants directly and assisting older children when they feed themselves, feeding children slowly and patiently, and encouraging children to eat without forcing them.

Where are we today?

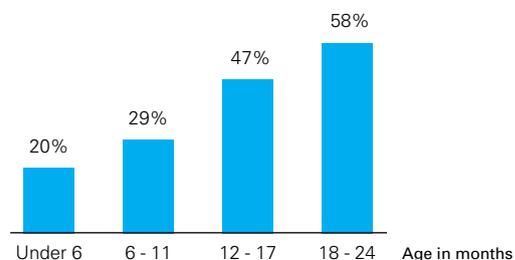
In India, only one child in five (21 per cent) between 6 and 24 months is fed according to recommended practices; only 35 per cent are fed foods from a minimum number of different food groups; and only 42 per cent are fed a minimum number of times per day. Poor complementary

foods and feeding practices in terms of quantity, quality and frequency threaten the survival, growth and development of Indian children as indicated by the fact that 58 per cent of children 18 to 24 months old are stunted (chronic malnutrition).

Complementary feeding practices of children 6 to 24 months of age (%)



Proportion of children under two who are stunted (%)



Source: NFHS-3, 2006

One child in five under six months is stunted (chronic malnutrition); this proportion increases to 58 per cent among children 18 to 24 months old. This indicates that children have been fed poorly for a long period of time, resulting in poor growth and development.

How to make feeding the right food in the right way possible for all young children?

Raise awareness, ensure access

- Raise awareness among leaders, policy makers, programme planners and opinion setters on the central role of good foods and feeding practices in the vulnerable age window 6 to 24 months.
- Strengthen the capacity of families and local groups to prepare age-appropriate complementary foods for children 6 to 24 months old with locally available foods.
- Advocate for social safety nets ensuring access to age-appropriate foods and essential nutrients for children 6 to 24 months old, particularly in food insecure households.
- Advocate for the use of micronutrient supplements and/or fortified complementary foods, where local diets are unable to meet the specific nutrient needs of young children.

Improve programmes, scale up interventions

- Improve the performance of frontline workers in primary health care centres, anganwadi centres and communities (home counselling) in promoting and supporting the use of age-appropriate complementary foods and feeding practices for children 6 to 24 months old.