

An update on infant nutrition

Uma atualização em nutrição infantil

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The nutritional status of a population is one of the major indicators of its quality of life, and mirrors the model of development of a given society. Therefore, this supplement to the Journal of Pediatrics is of extreme relevance as it focuses on infant and adolescent nutrition in different situations. In addition, this supplement also touches upon the most prevalent nutritional disorders in our country.

If a healthy population has good nutrition, this does not depend solely on the availability of adequate food but also on medical assistance and education of the people. Nutritional education starts very early, during the first months of life, when eating habits are formed. We believe that this habit is formed during the first year of life, and this is what the first article in this supplement deals with.

After that, there is an article on breast-feeding, which is NA essential component for good health and nutrition at the initial stage of life. The article emphasizes the practical aspects of breast-feeding promotion and management with the aim of helping health professionals to counsel women on practicing "optimal breast-feeding", which means exclusive breast-feeding for approximately 6 months and complementary feeding for two or more years.

New findings on the ideal nutrition of infants and their physiology have buried some concepts and practices of pediatrics. We know that today an adequate and timely complementary feeding is essential for good nutrition. The article on complementary feeding, in view of current information, is concerned with the concept of adequate nutrition in terms of quality, quantity, consistency, frequency, and food preparation.

As adolescents have distinct characteristics and necessities of their own, an article that focuses on this group was written. On the one hand, the cumulative effect of chronic malnutrition becomes quite evident in this group; and on the other hand, obesity originates from inappropriate eating habits. Therefore, the article emphasizes the importance of monitoring adolescent growth, and also their sexual maturation, as it is common knowledge that living conditions and nutrition interfere with pubertal development. Adolescence has to be faced as an opportunity that should not be wasted, and maybe as the last chance for nutritional rehabilitation and prevention of future problems.

Nutritional status surveillance, starting from the moment of birth, is crucial, as the chances for nutritional rehabilitation are higher, the sooner an intervention is performed. The article on child and adolescent nutritional status provides updated information, allowing health professionals to diagnose nutritional disorders very early and accurately.

Among nutritional disorders, this article touches upon protein-energy malnutrition, obesity, anemia and hypovitaminosis A, taking into consideration the importance and prevalence of these problems. Other issues that are discussed include anorexia nervosa and bulimia, which are common eating behavior disorders during adolescence and which may cause severe nutritional disorders.

Although there is a decrement in the prevalence of child malnutrition all over Brazil, it is still a public health problem in certain population subgroups. The article that is concerned with this topic is mainly focused on the management of children who suffer from protein-energy malnutrition.

If, on one hand, malnutrition in Brazil is still a worry; on the other hand, children's overindulgent eating behavior, manifested through obesity, also deserves some attention. In some places, malnutrition is being replaced with obesity, and this can not be neglected, as this kind of disorder is related to nontransmissible chronic diseases in adulthood. In view of this growing concern, this supplement presents an updated approach on this problem in children and adolescents.

Despite the improved nutritional status of Brazilian children, the prevalence of anemia has been increasing, becoming a basic public health problem. In underprivileged populations, more than half of children less than 2 years suffer from iron-deficiency anemia. The article on complementary feeding is concerned with the role of nutrition in the prevention of anemia, while the diagnosis and management of anemia are discussed in the article on childhood iron-deficiency anemia.

The magnitude of hypovitaminosis A is still unknown in nonendemic areas. Possibly, vitamin A deficiency is also present in these areas. Therefore, it is necessary that special attention be paid to children's diet in order to prevent hypovitaminosis A. The problem, however, concentrates in endemic areas. Readers will find a detailed review on this topic in the article on hypovitaminosis A and xerophthalmia.

This supplement also covers nutrition of children with diseases that may compromise their nutritional status. The articles "Principles of nutritional support in pediatrics" and "Parenteral nutrition" instruct health professionals on how to prevent the development and complications of malnutrition in diseased children. Last but not least, this supplement includes an article on nutrition of children who practice sports. Athletes, family members and coaches need to be informed about the specific dietary necessities and care required by this group. The article on nutrition and sports provides updated information on the issue.

Child and adolescent adequate nutrition is a duty of government, families, teachers, health professionals, that is, of society as a whole. Brazilian Society of Pediatrics, through this supplement of Journal of Pediatrics, is contributing to such a task by providing pediatricians and other health professionals with updated information, intended for the promotion of adequate nutrition. By promoting adequate nutrition for our children and adolescents, we are building healthier generations for the future.

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