

Inflammatory bowel disease and malnutrition



What is malnutrition?

Children with inflammatory bowel diseases (IBD), such as Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis, are more likely to suffer from malnutrition. If your child has IBD, it is important for them to have a balanced and nutritious diet to help them manage the disease.

Malnutrition happens when the body does not get enough nutrition to do its everyday functions. IBD can make it hard for your child's body to digest food and absorb nutrients. This can lead to low vitamin levels and malnutrition.

What are signs of malnutrition?

Some signs include:

- Weight loss
- Fatigue (extreme tiredness) or lack of energy
- Growth delay or short height
- Loss of fat and muscle
- Muscle weakness
- Decreased bone strength
- Poor wound healing

How does IBD cause malnutrition?

- Inflammation in the small intestine makes it hard to break down food and absorb nutrients.
- Inflammation in the large intestine makes it hard to absorb water and electrolytes.
- Other common IBD symptoms can lead to dehydration, iron deficiency and anemia. These symptoms include:
 - Diarrhea
 - Abdominal (belly) pain
 - Nausea
 - Rectal bleeding
 - Decreased appetite
 - Chronic (long-term) blood loss

How can I help my child avoid malnutrition?

To help your child avoid malnutrition:

- Offer them a balanced diet of fruits, vegetables, grains and protein.
- Ask about blood tests that check for low vitamin and mineral levels.
- Talk with the doctor about what vitamins your child needs.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

Inflammatory bowel disease and malnutrition, continued

Talk with your child's gastroenterologist (GI doctor) about special diets that may help treat IBD and malnutrition. A registered dietitian (nutritionist) can teach you more about these diets. Diets include:

- Only enteral nutrition (formula by mouth or through a feeding tube)
- Some enteral nutrition (formula by mouth or through a feeding tube) and some regular foods
- Specific carbohydrate diet (SCD)
- Crohn's disease exclusion diet (CDED)

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.

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