The immediate consequences of early poor nutrition on children’s health include an increased risk of morbidity and mortality from illness, and delayed mental and motor development.

Global Dietary Patterns and Diets in Childhood: Implications for Health Outcomes
by Lindsay H. Allen

Key insights
Complementary feeding in developing countries is often restricted to cereals and legumes; however, it is important to add fruits, vegetables, and animal source foods to the diet to meet children’s micronutrient needs. The inclusion of milk and dairy products or fish and meat in children’s diets in developing countries is associated with faster growth, weight gain, and better cognitive performance.

Current knowledge
Since the 1970s, in order to prevent undernutrition and stunting, child feeding recommendations have been focusing on exclusive breastfeeding from birth to 6 months and introduction of high-quality complementary foods in addition to continued breastfeeding up to 2 years. Only in the late 1980s and early 1990s was growth stunting recognized as being caused by a lack of micronutrients in children’s diets.

Practical implications
If families cannot afford including animal source foods in the diet, fortification with micronutrient powders or lipid-based supplements may be able to prevent micronutrient deficiencies.

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