

The dietitian and disease related malnutrition in children

Why could a child become malnourished as a result of a disease?

- Increased nutrient requirements
- Decreased intake due to the disease
- Abnormal metabolism of nutrients due to the disease
- Psychological factors related to being ill – a child often uses his/her diet as a way of non-verbal expression of feelings about his/her disease. The intake of food or not is often the only part of treatment that they have control over.

Some diseases that are often causes for malnutrition in a child

- Celiac disease
- Cystic fibrosis
- Cancer
- TB
- AIDS
- Diabetes
- Kidney disease
- Cerebral Palsy

What is the impact of disease related malnutrition on a child?

- Growth and development are impaired/delayed
- Longer stay in hospital
- Increased mortality
- Higher costs of care

What is the role of the dietitian in all of this?

The dietitian is a registered health professional with unique education in medical nutrition therapy, i.e. using nutrition to help treat diseases and their impact on the growth and development of a child. The dietitian is equipped to:

- Assess the diseased child's nutritional status
- Determine the unique nutritional requirements related to each disease type
- Determine the nutrition care plan and route of nutrition therapy
- Educate parents about their child's unique nutritional needs and ways to meet these requirements.
- Accompany the child and his/her family throughout the course of the disease with regular follow-up and monitoring, thereby allowing the child to reach his/her full potential in life!