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# GETTING CONNECTED

## NUTRITION CARE FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL HEALTH CARE NEEDS

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### Why is early identification and prevention of nutrition problems so important?

Good nutrition is necessary to promote optimal growth and development. Children with special health care needs are at high risk for nutrition-related problems. Malnourished children are less active and have a decreased attention span resulting in less exploratory behavior and fewer learning opportunities. They are also more frequently ill than other children.

### What are the most common nutrition related concerns?

- Delayed growth, underweight, overweight
- Feeding difficulties (delays in progression of feeding skills, mechanical feeding problems, extended bottle feeding)
- Nutrient-medication interactions (secondary to long-term use of medications)
- Special formula, tube feeding or use of therapeutic diet (requires ongoing monitoring to prevent diet inadequacy, metabolic imbalance or excess weight gain or loss)
- Dental disease (including excess caries, early childhood caries, and gum hyperplasia which may limit the child's ability to consume foods)
- Diet inadequacy (including diets that are low or excessive in nutrients)

Early identification and referral to nutrition services can help prevent these concerns.

### How can children be screened to identify nutrition concerns or risk?

- Children should be weighed and measured (height or length, weight, head circumference) and the measurements recorded on the CDC

Growth Charts at each child's health exam. Remember to plot weight for length (birth to 36 months) or Body Mass Index (BMI) for older children. Ongoing measurements provide the best information about a child's growth.

- Parents should be asked, verbally or in writing, about the common nutrition concerns at each child's health exam. Also, see Bright Futures for questionnaires [www.brightfutures.org/nutrition](http://www.brightfutures.org/nutrition)
- Nutrition screening tools (to be completed by health care provider or parent/guardian) are available from the web site – Nutrition for Children With Special Health Care Needs [http://depts.washington.edu/cshcnnut/nut\\_services\\_wa.html](http://depts.washington.edu/cshcnnut/nut_services_wa.html)

### What should be done when nutrition concerns are identified?

- Collaborate with families and healthcare professionals, including CSHCN coordinators at local health departments, to identify which nutrition resources would best meet the child's needs.
- Provide anticipatory guidance that addresses concerns that are typical for developmental age of the child. See the Bright Futures web site for health care and nutrition information at: [www.brightfutures.org/nutrition](http://www.brightfutures.org/nutrition)

Family Fact Sheets describing nutrition issues by age are available for printing from the Bright Futures program site at: [www.brightfutures.org/nutrition/resources.html](http://www.brightfutures.org/nutrition/resources.html)

- If the identified nutrition concerns are more complex, a referral should be made to a Registered Dietitian (RD) for further nutrition assessment and intervention. Referrals may be made by the primary care provider (PCP) and are required by the PCP if payment will be requested for a child who has a medical coupon.
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## Local Nutrition Resources

The Center for Children with Special Health Care Needs located at Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center provides a website of County Pages for Washington State. To locate your county's resource page go to:

[www.cshcn.org/resources/resourceguides.cfm](http://www.cshcn.org/resources/resourceguides.cfm)

The county pages list nutrition resources that may include:

- Members of the WA state CSHCN Nutrition Network (RD's who have completed a nutrition training program for children with special health care needs provided by the Center on Human Development and Disability at the University of Washington.)
- Interdisciplinary feeding teams for children with complex nutrition/feeding problems. See also [http://depts.washington.edu/cshcnnut/feeding\\_teams\\_list.html](http://depts.washington.edu/cshcnnut/feeding_teams_list.html)
- Community-based nutrition programs including:
  - WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children) – [www.withinreachwa.org/forprof/wic\\_search/search.php](http://www.withinreachwa.org/forprof/wic_search/search.php)
  - Food Stamps – [https://fortress.wa.gov/dshs/f2ws03esaapps/onlinecso/food\\_assistance\\_program.asp](https://fortress.wa.gov/dshs/f2ws03esaapps/onlinecso/food_assistance_program.asp)
  - Child Nutrition Programs (USDA) including school breakfast, lunch and summer food programs – [www.k12.wa.us/ChildNutrition](http://www.k12.wa.us/ChildNutrition)
  - Commodity Foods Program or Food Banks, if food availability is a concern.

For more information and resources on nutrition for children with special health care needs, see <http://depts.washington.edu/cshcnnut>

## Nutrition Resources Beyond the Local Community

- ❖ Hospital-based specialty clinics or outpatient clinics with RD's include:
  - Tertiary Care Centers
    - Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center, Seattle  
[www.chmc.org](http://www.chmc.org)

- Mary Bridge Children's Hospital and Health Center, Tacoma  
[www.multicare.org](http://www.multicare.org)
- Madigan Army Medical Center, Tacoma  
[www.mamc.amedd.army.mil/mamc/mamcexthome.htm](http://www.mamc.amedd.army.mil/mamc/mamcexthome.htm)
- Sacred Heart Children's Hospital, Spokane – [www.shmchildren.org](http://www.shmchildren.org)

- University of Washington Center on Human Development and Disability (CHDD) – [http://depts.washington.edu/chdd/ucedd/ctu\\_5/5\\_ctumain.html](http://depts.washington.edu/chdd/ucedd/ctu_5/5_ctumain.html)

- ❖ Neurodevelopmental Centers of Washington (not all provide nutrition services) – [www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/mch/ndc.htm](http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/mch/ndc.htm)

## Reimbursement

Coverage for nutrition services and medical formulas may be provided by the family health plan or by Medicaid for eligible children. For more information, including the Medicaid Medical Nutrition Program, see: <http://fortress.wa.gov/dshs/maa>

## What should be done to ensure all providers are aware of nutrition issues, interventions and follow-up?

- Provide copies of all communications, reports and evaluations that include nutrition assessment and intervention to the family and the PCP following HIPAA guidelines.
- Include nutrition and feeding objectives in Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) (developed at early intervention programs for infants and toddlers less than 3 years of age) or Individualized Educational Plan (IEP), (developed at public school programs) to ensure that nutrition/feeding needs are addressed.
- Include copies of nutrition interventions and reports along with copies of IFSP or IEP to other community providers including WIC, early intervention and school programs.



Children with Special Health Care Needs Program  
<http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/mch/cshcnhome2.htm>



University of Washington, Seattle, WA  
<http://depts.washington.edu/chdd>