

Nutrition

& Advanced HIV Disease

What You Need to Know





What is Nutrition?

Nutrition is eating the right food for health and growth.

Good nutrition helps the body to stay strong and fight infections.

What is Malnutrition?

Malnutrition occurs when the body does not receive the right amount of nutrients, either due to excessive or insufficient intake (undernutrition and overnutrition)

Types of Malnutrition

Chronic malnutrition: This is slow growth over a long time, and a person appears shorter than expected for their age.

Acute Malnutrition: It is a condition where an individual experiences rapid weight loss or a failure to gain weight, resulting in low weight for their height (wasting). It indicates recent or severe weight loss due to inadequate food intake and/or illness and can quickly become life-threatening if not addressed.

Acute malnutrition is classified into two categories:

- **Moderate Acute Malnutrition (MAM):** The person is thin but not severely. They may appear weak and may have reduced appetite or activity.
- **Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM):** The person is extremely thin, may have visible bones, swelling of the feet, limbs, or face (oedema), or reduced consciousness. SAM requires urgent medical attention.



Why Nutrition Matters in AHD

- People with AHD have a weakened immune system, making them more vulnerable to infections (e.g., TB, diarrhoea, oral thrush).
- Good nutrition strengthens the immune system, supports recovery, improves response to antiretroviral therapy (ART), and reduces the risk of death. Malnutrition, which means not getting the right amount of food or nutrients your body needs to stay healthy, weakens the immune system; weak immunity worsens AHD progression, and HIV increases nutrient needs.

Nutritional Needs in AHD

People with AHD need:

- Increased energy: To fight infections and heal faster.
- More protein: To rebuild tissue and support immune function.
- Micronutrients (vitamins and minerals): to boost immunity and prevent deficiencies.

Feeding Tips for PLHIV with AHD

- Eat small, frequent meals (even 5–6 times/day if possible).
- Include energy-dense and protein-rich foods (meat, beans, groundnuts, eggs, milk).
- Add fats/oils to porridge or cooked food to increase energy.
- Drink plenty of clean fluids, especially when sick.
- If oral sores exist, give soft, soothing foods like mashed potatoes, porridge, or soup.
- Continue feeding during illness- don't stop even when appetite is low.



Danger Signs of Malnutrition to Watch out for

- Weight loss
- Fatigue or weakness
- Swelling of the feet or face
- Poor appetite
- Slow recovery from illnesses

When to Refer to a Facility

- Rapidly losing weight
- Refusing to eat
- Has persistent diarrhoea
- Has visible wasting or swelling
- Always tired or sick

At the facility, in addition to your nutritional history, the HCW should -

- Monitor your weight, height, BMI, and you will be routinely monitored
- Assess you for any other factors that might affect your nutritional status e.g., drugs you are taking, other clinical diseases, etc.)

Community Role in Supporting Nutrition

- Encourage kitchen gardening for access to vegetables.
- Promote local food solutions that are affordable and rich in nutrients.
- Support exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of life.
- Reduce stigma so that families can seek help early.
- Map out and refer PLHIV to organizations that offer nutritional services and products.

<https://www.thriveinfo.org>

<https://www.afrocab.org>

Through the generous support of Unitaid, the Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI)-led THRIVE Project is enabling access to critical prevention, screening, and treatment commodities for advanced HIV disease to dramatically reduce mortality among adults and children living with HIV. In partnership with CHAI through this project, AFROCB is leading community and civil society engagement in collaboration with global and local stakeholders.

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