

Nutrition session plan:

Materials:

Community nutrition for eastern Africa (CNA).
Community health worker's manual (CHW).
Where there is no doctor (WND).
Health education and essential text for schools (HE).

This will be a difficult topic to teach as many people do not have the means to feed themselves and their families well. Although we have promoted adult learners as needing topics to be clearly related to their own lives, for this sensitive topic it would be best to keep it theoretical and abstract. Make it clear that you are talking about what the body ideally needs, not what you expect people to do. It is important that people know about the body's needs as any step towards satisfying them will help, this is not an all or nothing topic. It is worth trying to teach these sessions during a time when food is relatively plentiful so that people can try out what you are suggesting.

Session 1: Food and nutrients.

(Annex 1-3 and chapter 9 CNA, P 108 CHW, P 115-116 WND, Chapter 2 HE)

The key points which you want people to take away from this session are:

- different foods serve different purposes
- the 3 food categories
- why the body needs all 3 categories

Start by outlining simply and clearly what food contains (edible part, waste part) discuss what the waste parts of different foods are. Then outline what the body needs nutrients for and how the nutrients are grouped. Explain that all foods contain different groups of nutrients most contain more than one group but many have one overriding group by which they can be categorised.

Before the class, draw out pictures of different foods and a table with the titles: energy foods (carbohydrates), bodybuilding foods (proteins) and protective foods (vitamins and minerals). Get people to come and place the foods in the different categories, ask them why they think they fulfil these purposes. If they have misplaced foods then spend some time re-categorising them and clearly explaining why you are moving them. Explain clearly what you mean by each group and why each is needed.

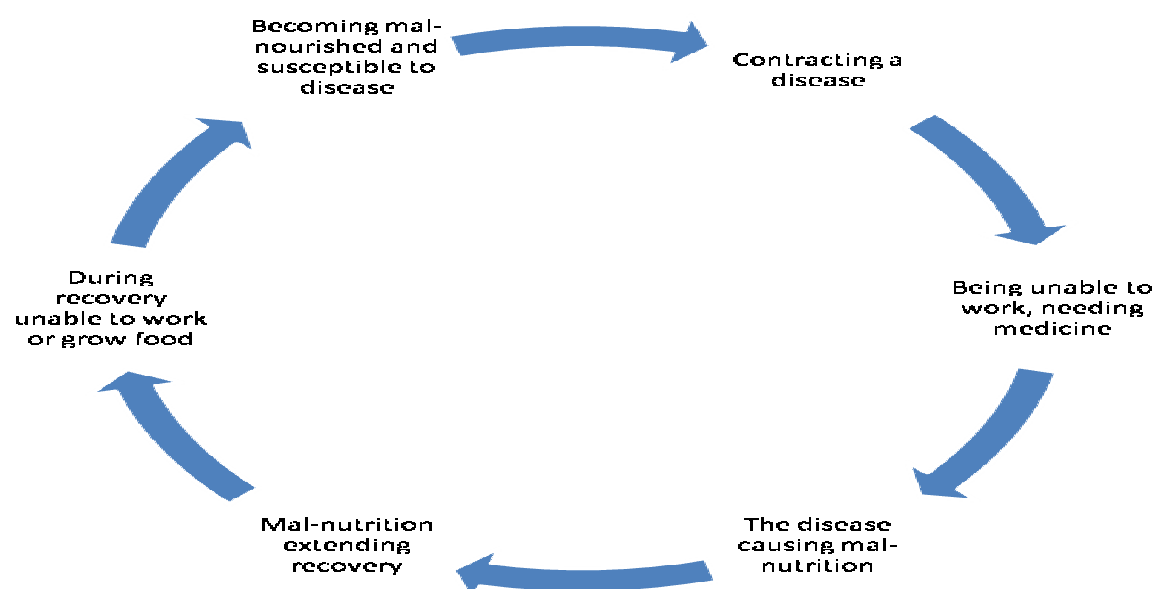
Next ask people how they think foods should be grouped to create complete meals, in light of the foods functions. Can they think of differences between an adult's ideal meal and a child's? Describe the 3 colour system as a good guideline for healthy eating. With the class create some healthy meal menus using foods which are available to them.

Session 2: Preventing and recovering from disease with nutrition

(Chapter 14, p 140-144, Annex 1 CNA)

In this session you want to emphasise the link between disease susceptibility and nutrition. Get people thinking about good nutrition as a preventative measure against diseases. Outline and discuss with the group how undernutrition can make infection worse and how infection can make undernutrition worse.

Draw out the cycle of: becoming malnourished and susceptible to disease, contracting a disease, being unable to work and needing to find money to buy medicines, the disease then causing malnutrition, malnutrition extending recovery time during which, people are weak and less able to work than, thus making it hard to make money or grow food and causing malnutrition starting the cycle all over again.



Although spending money on good nutrition may not be an option for some, it is important that it be a priority as soon as it is possible. Even short periods of good nutrition can build up the immune system and help fend off disease for a time afterwards. Have people think back to the previous session and pinpoint particular food groups that could help: in supporting the immune system, in fighting disease, in ensuring a speedy recovery. Which actual foods would these be? This could be done as a class or in smaller groups with each group focusing on one stage.

Session 3: Nutrition of mothers and babies.

(Chapters 10, 11, 12 CNA, P 110-113 CHW, P125-127 WND)

This is the group of society with the most specialised needs. Tell the group this and ask them why that is. The answer may seem obvious but it is easy to forget that a pregnant woman really is eating for two and will continue to do so while breastfeeding. It is also easy to think that babies are small and thus do not need much food, this is false and neglects the fact that babies are growing more and faster than any other group. Make sure these important points are properly acknowledged and understood. Your group will no doubt have experience in pregnancy and breastfeeding, get them talking about how it effected them and whether they found they had to alter their diets.

Breastfeeding is the healthiest way to feed a baby. It provides protection against many diseases as well completely satisfying it nutritional needs (including water). it is the ideal food for babies, baby formula, is a suitable alternative for women who can not breastfeed but it is not superior to breast milk. There are many myths about breastfeeding and formula. Spend time finding out women's thoughts on this issue, sit down with them in a non threatening setting to talk about their views, what they have heard what they think, what they have done.

This may take the rest of the session, that is fine it is important that you find out how they feel and what they think. You may find that you do not know if they are right or wrong in which case you should finish the session here and give yourself some time to find out.

Go on to address the issues brought up in the discussion with what you have read about their validity. Make sure that you clearly address and outline the value of breast milk and advantages of breastfeeding as well as the difficulties that one might encounter, then go on to outline when bottle feeding should be used and its potential dangers.

Next discuss with people how long they think mothers should continue to breastfeed for and when they should start to introduce solid foods. Draw up a timeline on which you have marked the ideal length of time to breastfeed for, when to introduce semi-solid and solid foods and when to begin weaning. Have people mark on the timeline when and in what form they introduced different foods, did they find this easy or was it hard to get the baby take solids. Discuss the weaning process, what the baby should be fed and how often. Refer back to the first session and ask which food groups does the baby need (this is a trick question as the baby needs all of them), it is important that people understand that just because a baby is small and can only eat small amounts it does not mean that it does not have the same needs as other family members.

Session 4: Different diets for different people

(Chapter 9, 10, 13, p 139-140 CNA)

For this you could split the group into 3 or 4 groups right at the beginning, assigning each group an age and sex. Get each group to describe themselves, are they energetic? Do they work all day? Do they menstruate? Are they growing?... Show how these personal and lifestyle descriptions can inform you about nutritional needs. Each group should then compile their ideal diets.

Alternatively you could make it into a game where you lay a table with a paper meal, if there are 5 groups this is equivalent to 5 family members sitting at a table. Cut out bits of paper representing small or large portions of different foods e.g. ugali, eggs, spinach and pawpaw. As a reminder have on the board the nutritional value and content of each of these foods. The groups then have to win small or large portions of the foods by arguing their needs are greatest. You should already know whose needs are greatest so if a group is forgetting to mention an important point which makes them worthy ask them a leading question about it. At the end of the game review how the food was correctly distributed and make sure everyone understands why. Ask if food gets distributed like this in reality? If not why? Who often gets deprived? How can this be avoided?

Session 5: Understanding malnutrition and its consequences.

(Chapters 2-3-17-18 CNA, P 119-122 and 128-135WND)

Start your session with a discussion about malnutrition:

What is it?

Who can it effect?

What can cause it?

What are its consequences?

This is bound to be an area in which many people have experience, allow them to talk and share their thoughts, be sensitive and involve quiet people. Write down the answers that you hear to ensure you remember them.

Now answer the questions in writing or drawings on the board. Get as many answers from the group as possible, add your own extra information to them if they are incomplete. Think before the session which points were surprising to you, often the link between intelligence and malnutrition is unknown or the fact that you can eat a lot of one thing and be full but still have malnutrition due to lack of micronutrients. Focus on the things which you feel they will find interesting, new and surprising.

Look in depth at the signs of nutritional disorders, try to provide illustrations for as many as possible. Then have a role play exercise with patients and doctors diagnosing each other. If you have a small group you could play charades, with one person (perhaps yourself first) getting up in front of the class and play acting some symptoms, talking about their life and diet and the class guessing which disorder the character is suffering from.

Session 6: Value for money foods and saving food for difficult times.

(P77-83 CNA, P120-123 WND and P118-119 CHW)

As you have already discussed with the group, it can be difficult to eat well due to the expense. In this session you want to present some good value foods, which they might be able to include in their diets without spending too much money as well as ideas on how to manage a food budget well. You will have to assess the validity of the suggestions in the book, some may not be appropriate to your area or groups, eliminate them. You should also spend sometime thinking about what people do to improve their nutrition, are there some traditional practices which may fulfil a nutritional need without people realising that that is the purpose. Also try to pinpoint some women in the village who are particularly inventive in how they feed their families, invite them to the session and ask them to share their ideas.

As a group write up an action plan of simple affordable additions, substitutions or changes that could help improve nutrition. These can be anything from changes in cooking methods or purchased foods to changes in produce grown in gardens. If people mention changes in gardening practices, inform them that there are sessions and information on drip irrigation and conservation farming which could help them cultivate better garden.

Everywhere has a dry season, this often equates to a hungry season, for some this can be many months, during which they have little food and become malnourished. How do people deal with this time in your area? Do they plan for it by saving foods? If not explain the different methods of drying foods such as meat and vegetables; doing this can provide much needed vitamins and minerals at a time when they are hard to come by. Also discuss food storage, is the hungry season made worse by food stores being ruined? If so what are the main problems? Outline the key necessities for a good food store e.g. they must keep rats out, they must keep food dry and clean...and how these can be achieved. If there is a well built store in the vicinity you could finish the lesson with a walk to see it. If not draw out the example from the book and talk about how each feature contributes towards making the store successful.