

No child should suffer from malnutrition

Norma Nahui lives with her husband and three daughters in a small town in Apurimac in the centre of Peru. Her youngest daughter Nayeli Amira is 23 months old. Naheli loves playing with her doll alongside her older sisters and smiles when the small sheep that the family is raising comes up to her. She is a happy and healthy kid but it has not always been like this.

When Naheli was born she measured only 46.8 cm and gained little weight during her first month of life. Luckily other mothers noticed that Naheli hadn't grown as much as she should have. Norma went to health workers and received guidance on feeding practices and soon her daughter gained weight and grew.



photo: UNICEF



photo: UNICEF

Everything seemed to be fine. However, when Naheli was 15 months old, she was diagnosed with moderate anemia, with a haemoglobin level of 9.2 g/dl. Her mother Norma was quite worried. In the health establishment she was given multiple-micronutrient powder (MNP) locally referred to as "Chispitas". Chispitas included iron, zinc, folic acid, vitamin A and C. All five elements are key for child growth and development. Apurimac was part of the MNP pilot project launched with the support of UNICEF and Zinc Saves Kids in 2010.

Norma was told to sprinkle the Chispitas once per day on Naheli's meal. At first, Naheli refused to eat her meal when mixed with the micronutrient powder. Knowing how important the micronutrients were for her daughter's health and development, she tried mixing the Chispitas with mango and Naheli gladly ate the mango. When the mango season was over Norma tried mixing the Chispitas with purple corn pudding, a type of corn easily available in the small community, and saw that her daughter accepted that mixture too.

With the support of UNICEF the local health services organized meetings to educate mothers on the importance of iron, zinc and other vitamins and nutrients. Norma participated in these meetings and learnt about nutritious foods and dishes to prevent micronutrient deficiencies.

After five months of treatment with Chispitas Naheli was free from anemia. Her mother Norma was immensely happy and decided to become a health facilitator in her district. She encourages other mothers to give Chispitas to their children and shares her experience, explaining how she was able to cure her daughter with Chispitas. Norma said that some mothers don't believe in supplements and say "we knew nothing about this before and nothing happened to us". On those occasions Norma replies "probably we did not know that we had anemia because no analyses were made at the time. However, today we know that anemia and other micronutrient deficiencies affect the development of our children's brains and afterwards they have trouble learning in school."

Norma will continue to work as a health promoter ensuring "that in my district no children suffer from malnutrition or anemia."

Based on information provided by UNICEF; © International Zinc Association, 2014



Iron, Vitamin A and C, Folic acid and ZINC