
One Mother at a Time: Bringing Dietary Diversity and Better Health to Infants and Young Children in the Kyrgyz Republic

By **SPRING/Kyrgyz Republic**



Photo credit: SPRING/Kyrgyz Republic

Nurse Usupova Mairam (on the left) counsels Jazgul about the best way to feed her one-year-old daughter Aitunuk.

Each month, SPRING-trained health providers reach 10,000 mothers of children under two with nutrition counseling and quality nutrition services across the Naryn and Jalal-Abad *oblasts* of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Twenty-nine year-old mother of four, Akhunova Jazgul had no idea that feeding tea to her one-year-old might lead to anemia. A homemaker in Naryn town in the Kyrgyz Republic, Jazgul had never received comprehensive information about proper infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices. That was before she met Usupova Mairamkul, the health provider who would bring dietary diversity, good feeding practices, and better health to Jazgul's family.

Mairamkul has more than 35 years of experience living and working as a nurse at a Family Group Practice in Naryn, where 13 percent of children under five are stunted.¹ Overall, only 16 percent of Kyrgyz children eat the recommended minimum acceptable diet.² In March 2016, Mairamkul received training on IYCF from the USAID-funded Strengthening Partnerships, Results, and Innovations in Nutrition Globally (SPRING) project. Although Mairamkul is a mother, she was also unaware of the optimal feeding practices for children under two years. Empowered by her newfound knowledge, she grew confident in her ability to counsel pregnant women and those with children under two.

Mairamkul soon put her new skills to the test by helping Jazgul, whose youngest daughter, Aitunuk, is a year old. Although Jazgul thought Aitunuk's growth seemed to be normal, Mairamkul was

¹ UNICEF-WHO-World Bank: 2014 Joint Child Malnutrition Estimates: Levels and Trends.
<http://www.who.int/nutgrowthdb/estimates/en/>

² 2012 Kyrgyz Republic Demographic and Health Survey.
<http://dhsprogram.com/what-we-do/survey/survey-display-383.cfm>

worried about her development. Mairamkul discovered that even though Aitunuk was introduced to complementary foods at six months, Jazgul often gave her tea to quench her thirst, which can contribute to anemia.

Jazgul reported that Aikunuk was often ill, was not as active as other children her age, and did not sleep well at night. Mairamkul counseled Jazgul on the importance of feeding a variety of foods that are full of nutrients and age appropriate. She also stressed the importance of meal frequency.

In addition, the nurse spoke with Jazgul about the importance of hygiene, particularly handwashing before feeding the baby and after cleaning the baby's stool.

Jazgul followed Mairamkul's recommendations, and stopped giving Aitunuk tea, and began to notice subtle but important improvements in Aitunuk's health. Aitunuk was able to sleep better at night. Jazgul was overjoyed at the changes she witnessed, seeing the direct impact of optimal nutrition on the growth and health of her child.

Jazgul now pays more attention to her family's eating habits and actively tries to include a variety of foods on the table. Having become an advocate for nutrition, she is happy to share what she has learned with her relatives and neighbors who also have young children.

Nurse Mairamkul received her training as part of SPRING/Kyrgyz Republic's capacity building efforts, which have instructed over 1,231 health providers in IYCF counseling and nutrition services. In turn, these healthcare providers reach over 10,000

1,231 health providers trained in IYCF counseling and nutrition services



10,000 mothers of children under two reached each month with nutrition counseling and services



mothers of children under two each month across Naryn and Jalal-Abad *oblasts* of Kyrgyz Republic.

SPRING/Kyrgyz Republic works to improve the nutritional status of women and children within the Feed the Future zone of influence by improving nutrition-related behaviors, enhancing the quality and diversity of diets, and supporting evidence-based nutrition policies. SPRING's geographic focus is Jalalabad and Naryn oblasts. SPRING's work plan includes community interventions and mass media to improve nutrition practices at the household level as well as activities to strengthen delivery of nutrition services, including counseling through the health services.

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