

## Assessment

### Food Insecurity

Household food insecurity is a form of economic struggle that involves a lack of access to healthy food.

Socio-economic factors like poverty, lack of education, and employment, can impact a family's diet. Many families in this group often rely on high-calorie, low-cost food items.

For children, food insecurity can lead to malnourishment, weight gain, and even obesity. Food insecurity also can contribute to other physical and mental health problems among children, such as depression and anxiety, diabetes, asthma, poor oral health, fatigue, and headaches. Children who live with food insecurity often have higher rates of school absences, problems concentrating, and poor academic performance.

There are four levels of food security:

- **High Food Security:** Families face no problems acquiring adequate foods.
- **Marginal Food security:** Families face some problems acquiring adequate food, but the quality is not compromised.
- **Low Food Security:** Families consume low-quality foods, and quantity is significantly reduced.
- **Very Low Food Security:** Family eating patterns involve lower food intake due to lack of access to foods and resources.

To help children and parents overcome food insecurity, providers should study the root causes of why it occurs and what families often experience. For instance, many families who are food insecure worry food will run out regularly. They also struggle to afford balanced meals and sometimes feel hungry, but do not eat. Many families must choose between medications and food due to lack of finances, and some may go days without eating.

A universal screening tool to identify food insecurity is the [Hunger Vital Sign™](#). Households are considered at risk if they answer that either or both of the following two statements is “often true” or “sometimes true” (compared with “never true”):

1. “Within the past 12 months, we worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more.”
2. “Within the past 12 months, the food we bought just didn’t last, and we didn’t have money to get more.”

You can learn more about food insecurity in your specific county and city through Feeding America’s Map the Meal Gap project. The Feeding America website also offers information for families on where to find [local food resources](#), such as food banks, food pantries, and meal programs.

Once providers identify a food insecure child/family, they can offer advice, guidance, and support as needed, such as:

- Educate parents how food insecurity relates to their child's health.
- Connect the family with other resources, including:
  - Federal food programs, such as school breakfast and lunch, Summer Food Service Program, SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), and WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children)
  - Free community classes
  - Nutrition education and consultation
- Consider specific clinical needs for food insecure children.
- Document the impact of food insecurity on the child's health during all visits.