

CHILD SURVIVAL

Bimla and Jagdish Mondol's story

Bimala and Jagdish Mondol from Maldih village in West Bengal have three children. Although their youngest son is only four months old, it is their second daughter Ajanta that Bimala spends most of her time worrying about. Although only weighing 2.5 kg at birth, Ajanta was a healthy baby. Bimala had all the required check ups, injections and IFA tablets during the pregnancy and made sure her daughter was exclusively breastfed for the first seven months.

"When she was seven months old, I started feeding Ajanta puffed rice as well as breastmilk. I thought I had done everything right but when she was a year old, Ajanta started suffering regularly from fever and diarrhoea. I knew something was wrong but because we never visited a doctor I didn't know why my child was ill."

Kalpana Mahato, trained by Save the Children, visited the family for the first time in December, but it was only in March 2009 that she finally found out Ajanta's weight and explained to her parents that she was suffering from Grade IV malnutrition.

"The local center is very close, just the other side of the village," explains Bimala, "but we never had time to visit. My husband is always busy with work and I have lots of household chores to carry out. We were shocked and scared when we were explained how ill Ajanta was. I knew she was unwell but didn't think it was this bad."

Jagdish was equally worried. *"I was very scared at first when they spoke to us about basic nutrition and told us to feed Ajanta dal, egg yolk and fish whenever we had some."*

Ajanta's weight has improved over the last two months. *"In March, aged 3 and a half, she weighed just 5kg. Now she is a healthier 6.5 kgs, and is only listed as Grade II malnourished,"* explains Kalpana. *"This is good considering the level of poverty in the village."*

Despite the help, Bimala still finds it very hard to feed her daughter.

40% of children in West Bengal suffer from malnutrition. Economic circumstances, the rising cost of food and poor nutritional education all add to a problem which is likely to worsen if something is not done soon. Save the Children is working to strengthen the government's approach.

Ajanta's case proves, however just how complicated and ingrained the problem is.