



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

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Peanuts Help Treat Malnourished Pregnant Women in Malawi



Dr. Mark Manary

A woman feeds peanut-based RUTF to her child in Malawi.

The [Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Peanut and Mycotoxin](#) is using peanuts to improve the nutritional status of undernourished pregnant women in Malawi.

Dr. Mark Manary, one of the Lab's lead scientists and founder of [Project Peanut Butter](#), is identifying and treating severely undernourished pregnant women with a peanut-based Ready-To-Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF). Pregnant women are a very vulnerable population in Malawi, where maternal deaths are 1 in 400, the third highest in the world. A large portion of stunting occurs in the womb, which is why good nutrition during pregnancy has a significant impact on a child's growth potential. There is currently no standardized method to diagnose or treat moderate or severe undernutrition during pregnancy.

Peanuts are an ideal therapeutic food because, in addition to being high in protein, they are almost 50 percent fat or oil, which is a key element in the treatment of acute malnutrition.

"The beauty of the peanut formulation having so much oil in it is that its energy density is very high," says Dr. Manary. "This means a spoonful of peanut-based food is equal in calories to 5 or 6 spoonfuls of a traditional cereal like corn or rice. If you are undernourished, you need to get those nutrients in you to catch up. The high oil, low water content of this peanut-based food means that it doesn't spoil sitting around in a mud hut with a grass roof for two or three weeks. The food safety issues here are nominal, whereas if you cooked some kind of specialized porridge or dough and left it sitting around you couldn't eat it the next day."

The peanut-based RUTF has been well-received by Malawian women and is very popular.