

# Pack 107, Item 8

Type: Drama

October 2017

# \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Children need vitamin A**

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**Notes to broadcaster**

The following drama describes how mothers can help protect their young children from dangerous childhood illnesses caused by a lack of vitamin A. We all need vitamins and minerals for strong bodies and healthy minds and to fight off disease. Children especially need vitamin A for their physical growth, for their eyesight, and to help their bodies resist infection and disease. Children who are deficient in vitamin A are more likely to die from measles, malaria, or diarrhoea than children who have enough of the vitamin. One of the most serious consequences of a lack of vitamin A is a condition known as “dry eye” which, if untreated, will eventually result in total blindness.

In many parts of the world where vitamin A deficiency in children is a serious problem, programs to distribute vitamin A capsules have been implemented. But many rural areas lack the infrastructure necessary for successful supplement programs. Therefore, the focus of this drama is on natural food sources of vitamin A. However, you might wish to research whether distribution programs are available in your area, and broadcast this information in your program.

This drama creates suspense about what happened to Martha’s firstborn child, Uchenna, and eventually explains why she is so interested in knowing about vitamin A. Though the ending is sad, it is designed to have a powerful effect on listeners so that they will remember the consequences of vitamin A deficiency.

You could use this drama as inspiration to produce a similar program on recommended practices for growing soybean in your area. Or you might choose to present this drama as part of your regular farmer program, using voice actors to represent the speakers.

As a follow-up to the drama, you might invite a health care worker and an agricultural expert to your program to answer questions about vitamin A. Remember to publicize their appearance the day or week prior to broadcasting the program so that listeners will have time to think about questions they can ask.

Estimated duration of the script: 15 minutes, with intro and extro music.

**Characters:**Host
Nurse at health clinic
Martha: a young mother

**Host:** Good (*morning/afternoon/evening*) listeners. Today we’re going to talk about a serious problem that affects millions of children around the world. That might sound like bad news, but the good news is that it’s a problem that has a simple solution. I’m talking about vitamin A—and how many children don’t get enough of it.

We all know that a healthy diet means getting enough to eat, and eating the right kinds of foods. This is important for everyone, but it’s especially important for children. Children need essential nutrients, including vitamin A, to grow and develop into strong and healthy adults. On our program today, we’re going to talk about what can happen to children who don’t get enough vitamin A in the food they eat. More importantly, we’ll learn some simple ways to prevent this problem.

MUSICAL BREAK

**Host:** Children need vitamin A to help them fight infection and disease. Children who don’t have enough vitamin A in their diet don’t grow well and are much more likely to have serious, and sometimes deadly, childhood illnesses like measles, malaria, and diarrhea.

Children also need vitamin A to develop good eyesight. You might have heard of “night blindness.” This is often one of the first signs that your child is not getting enough vitamin A. If you notice that your child is having difficulty seeing at night, you should take immediate action to prevent total blindness.

Unfortunately, many children don’t get enough vitamin A in their diet. Let’s listen to a story to learn some very simple solutions to the problem of vitamin A deficiency.

FADE UP MUSIC AND HOLD FIVE SECONDS. FADE UNDER SOUND OF AN EIGHT-MONTH-OLD BABY LAUGHING AND GURGLING.

**Nurse:** Hello, Martha. I’m happy to see you here again at the clinic.

**Martha:** Hello, Nurse. I’ve come for Odinga’s monthly checkup to make sure he’s growing strong and healthy.

**Nurse:** He’s a beautiful baby. How old is he now?

**Martha:** He’s eight months old.

**Nurse:** It seems like only yesterday that you came here to give birth. Come inside and we’ll examine Odinga to make sure everything is fine. He seems to be growing well.

Footsteps walking up a dirt path. The sounds change to indicate they are now walking on a tile or concrete floor.

**Nurse:** Just hold him still. (The nurse’s voice changes. She is talking to the baby.) Hello, little Odinga. I’m just going to look in your mouth and then check your ears.

The baby lets out a loud wail.

**Nurse:** Yes, I know, that was a bit uncomfortable. Now, I’m going to listen to your chest with my stethoscope and feel your tummy. And then it will all be over.

The baby lets out another loud wail.

**Nurse: (**Laughing) At least we know your lungs are working well, little man. (To the mother) You’re doing a good job, Martha. This baby is very well-nourished.

**Martha:** I’m still breastfeeding, and I give him several small meals every day. My harvest has been plentiful this year so we all eat well. Odinga is a happy, healthy baby. Not at all like my first son, Uchenna. He was always sickly. I didn’t know then that my milk wasn’t enough once he reached six months old, and that I needed to feed him other foods as well. Even if I had known, we hardly had any food to eat that year …

**Nurse: (**Reflecting) Yes, you were both so thin and starved when you brought him to the clinic two years ago. Let’s hope we never have another drought like that one. You, more than anyone, know that all kinds of problems can begin when a baby doesn’t get enough food; and especially when they don’t get enough vitamin A in the food they eat. Vitamin A is so important to keep children healthy—I know you learned that the hard way.

But Odinga looks like he’s getting enough vitamin A from your milk, and from the other foods you give him. He’s a good, healthy baby. As he eats more and more solid food, the vitamin will keep him healthy. A child is growing fastest when he begins to eat solid food. So between six months and six years of age, it’s very important for him to get enough of this important nutrient. That way he should be able to fight off diseases much better.

 (Pause) Then, you won’t ever again need to make the long journey here with such a heavy heart as you did two years ago.

**MARTHA: (**Softly) There are other mothers with heavy hearts in my village. My friend’s little girl is almost three years old, and she got measles a few months ago. Now she can’t see very well when the light begins to fade in the evenings. She trips over things, just like my Uchenna did, and bumps into the furniture.

**Nurse:** It sounds as though she’s suffering from night blindness. Night blindness often results from the measles. The mother must act quickly to make sure her child is getting enough vitamin A in her diet. She should bring her little girl to the clinic so I can discuss this with her. And I’ll give her daughter a vitamin A capsule right away. Even though you can get enough vitamin A in the food you eat, if a child already shows signs that she’s not getting enough, it’s a good idea to take a capsule if they’re available. This will prevent the night blindness from developing into dry eye. Dry eye is far more dangerous, because it can lead to total blindness.

**Martha:** And in the next village, two small children have died from diarrhoea in the past six months.

**Nurse:** Yes, blindness isn’t the only danger. Diarrhoea is also a common sign that a child is not getting enough vitamin A. Please tell those mothers to come and see me, so that I can talk to them about the foods they are giving their children. You can also help these mothers by telling them which foods contain vitamin A. I know some of them are difficult for you to find. But let’s go over them so you have the information. Then you can pass it along to other mothers.

**Martha:** But I’m not a nurse or a doctor. These women won’t listen to me.

**Nurse:** I think they will trust you, Martha, if you explain to them why their children need vitamin A. Like you, they want their babies to have strong bodies and healthy minds. When they hear your story, they’ll trust your judgement.

 **(**Pause) Oh, look! Odinga is asleep. He’s so peaceful like that. Now, let’s go over those vitamin A-rich foods …

**Martha:** Well, I remember that children need milk. But once they’re older, and no longer at the breast, it’s expensive!

**Nurse:** It’s true, milk is a good source of vitamin A. Liver too—it’s packed with nutrients, so even a piece of liver the size of an egg will give your child lots of vitamin A.

But think about what you have at hand. I know you raise chickens. Vitamin A is in their eggs. And you can also get vitamin A from leafy green vegetables like spinach, and from orange and yellow vegetables like squash, carrots, pumpkin, and sweet potato.

 **(**To the baby) I’m sure little Odinga likes sweet potato. (To Martha) Orange fruits like mangoes, oranges, and papaya also have a rich supply of vitamin A.

**Martha:** I remember when I was pregnant you told me to eat lots of liver and leafy green vegetables to get enough vitamin A for myself and the baby. So I planted kale this year and it’s very good.

**Nurse:** Good! Do you also remember what I told you about red palm oil?

**Martha:** After what happened to my Uchenna, I thought it was very important to remember everything you told me. Red palm oil is one of the highest sources of vitamin A.

(Laughing) And don’t worry, I never let it get so hot that the colour disappears. I know when that happens, the vitamin disappears too. I also remember that oil and fat are needed for the body to absorb vitamin A. And you mentioned that in some cases, health workers might give vitamin A capsules to children who need them.

**Nurse:** Yes, there are programs to distribute vitamin A capsules in some areas … but, if possible, it’s best for babies and children to get vitamin A from breastmilk and from the foods they eat.

 **(**Pause) I’m thinking, Martha, that it might be a good idea for you to start a group for young and expectant mothers in your village. You could meet once a month. That way, you could keep them informed about important nutritional information for their children’s health.

**Martha:** You mean to talk about vitamin A?

**Nurse:** Not just vitamin A, but other nutrients like iron and iodine, which also help to develop a strong body and a sharp mind. In fact, you could discuss many aspects of healthy eating and nutrition. I could even come as a guest speaker.

**Martha:** Oh! When I think how much heartache could be avoided just by knowing about a healthy diet for our babies.

**Nurse:** Then you’ll consider the idea of the group?

**Martha:** Yes, I promise you I’ll consider it. But now I must hurry. I have something very important to do before I leave for my village.

**Nurse: (**Gently) I think I can guess what that is.

**Martha:** Yes, I’m going to visit my Uchenna’s grave and say a prayer for him and all the other small children who died because they didn’t have enough vitamin A in their diets, or enough food to survive and to thrive.

MUSICAL BREAK

**Host:** We’ve heard some very valuable information today—information that could save your child from sickness, a life of blindness, or even death.

Watch closely for symptoms of vitamin A deficiency in your children. Make sure you include foods that contain vitamin A in their diet. Find out if vitamin A capsules are distributed in your area. Your child’s life depends on it.

 Thank you for listening today. I’m your host, \_\_\_.

## Acknowledgements

This script was originally distributed in 1996 [Package 69, Script 3](http://scripts.farmradio.fm/radio-resource-packs/package-69-a-world-fit-for-children/children-need-vitamin-a/). It was updated and then re-reviewed by Erika Rodning, Registered Dietician, Farm Radio International, Arusha, Tanzania.

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