Nonorganic Failure to Thrive

What is nonorganic failure to thrive?

Nonorganic failure to thrive (NOFTT) is also known as psychosocial failure to thrive. Unlike organic failure to thrive, NOFTT occurs when an infant who is usually younger than 2 years old and has no known medical condition that causes poor growth. ¹

What causes nonorganic failure to thrive?

Psychological, social, or economic problems within the family almost always play a role in the cause of NOFTT. Emotional or maternal withdrawal is often related to the nutritional deprivation. The mother or primary caregiver may neglect proper feeding of the infant because of preoccupation with the demands or care of others, her own emotional problems, substance abuse, lack of knowledge about proper feeding, or lack of understanding of the infant’s needs. ¹

Factors that may contribute to NOFTT include:

- live in poverty
- lack the knowledge of caretaking
- have an addiction to alcohol or drugs
- have an eating disorder
- Young age of parent (teenage parents)
- Unplanned or unwanted pregnancy
- Lower levels of education (especially failure to complete high school)
- Lower socioeconomic status
- Absence of the father
- Absence of a support network (family, close friends, or other support)
- Mental illness, including severe postpartum depression

How to help prevent NOFTT

Parents need to be educated and truly understand how to take care of their baby. This is an important part of prenatal care. Therefore, parenting classes and support groups are strongly encouraged. ²

Early intervention programs are specifically designed to bring together the necessary resources to assist children with failure to thrive. The earlier high-risk parents become involved with such programs, the better the child does. ²

NOFTT has a lot to do with the parent-child relationships. If the parent doesn’t have a positive relationship with their child, and the child doesn’t feel secure with their caregiver, than this can have a huge impact on the child’s growth. The parent-child relationship is something to consider when noticing your child isn’t gaining weight appropriately. Secure attachments result when the children have caregivers who are consistently sensitive and responsive to their needs. Conversely, insecure attachments result if children have had insensitive or nonresponsive caregivers.