

Malnutrition - Overcoming the Problem

Malnutrition simply means poor nutrition. It can occur when a person's diet lacks essential nutrients.

The Consequences of Malnutrition include:

- increased risk of illness and infection
- slower wound healing
- increased risk of falls
- difficulty keeping warm
- low mood
- reduced energy levels
- reduced muscle strength

All of which may result in a hospital admission. This Food Fact Sheet is intended to support those who are not able to eat enough food to meet their needs.

Recognising Malnutrition

Malnutrition can affect anyone; however it is particularly common amongst older people and those who are socially isolated as a result of poor mobility, poor physical health or mental health problems. It can occur over a long period of time which sometimes makes it difficult to spot.

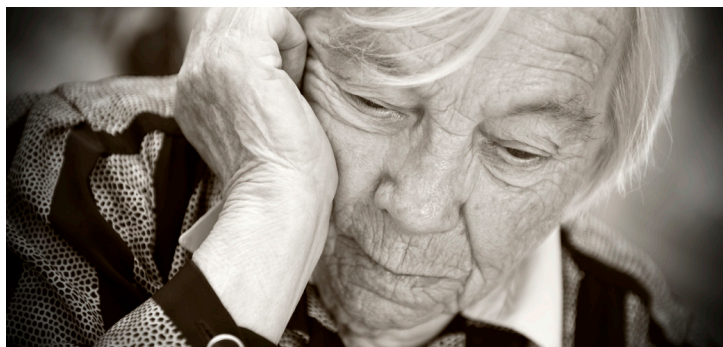
The following are common indicators of malnutrition:

- Weight loss – which can cause clothes, dentures, belts or jewellery to become loose.
- Tiredness and lethargy.
- Alterations in mood.
- Loss of appetite.
- Disinterest in food and/or fluids.
- General 'slowing up', for example, taking a long time to understand and answer questions.

Preventing Malnutrition

A balanced diet is essential for health and well-being. Try to implement the following guidance each day to ensure you are eating well:

- Eat 2-3 portions of high protein foods every day (e.g. meat, fish, eggs, nuts, beans, pulses, soya, quorn).
- Eat/drink 2-3 portions of dairy foods every day (e.g. cheese, milk and yoghurt).
- Eat a serving of starchy food at each meal (e.g. bread, cereals, potatoes, pasta or rice)
- Eat some fruit and vegetables every day and if possible try for 5 portions.



- Drink at least 6-8 glasses/mugs of fluid every day. Choose high calorie drinks where possible.

Typically, people are advised to limit foods high in fat and sugar; however when someone has a poor appetite and is malnourished, fat and sugar can help to improve energy intake without adding volume. Fats and sugars should therefore be routinely added to foods (see below for details).

Overcoming Malnutrition

The following simple ideas will help you increase the amount of energy you eat in a day:

- Eat 'little and often' – try a small snack between meals and a dessert after meals.
- Drinking plenty of fluids can help to prevent fatigue. Try to have drinks with, and between meals but try not to have drinks just before meals to avoid feeling too full to eat. Choose milky drinks, for example Horlicks, full fat milk, hot chocolate, Ovaltine and fruity milkshakes, and remember hot drinks may help to keep you warm.
- Avoid low fat/diet versions of foods and fluids for example skimmed or semi-skimmed milk, low fat yoghurt, diet drinks etc.
- Choose meals that you enjoy, are easy to prepare and eat, and are high in calories. Ready meals that are high in calories will have a red symbol next to the number of calories on the label.

Other High Calorie Foods*:

- Biscuits
- Cheese and crackers
- Thick and creamy yogurt
- Ice cream
- Crisps
- Nuts and Seeds
- Peanut Butter
- Bombay Mix
- Chips
- Chocolate

NOTE If there are any health concerns which have previously required you to limit fat and sugar in your diet, e.g. diabetes or high cholesterol, you should discuss this with a health professional.

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Add extra energy to foods and fluids by adding high calorie ingredients to food and drinks – suggestions listed below:

Add Sugar, Jam, Honey etc.* to:	Add Extra Fats e.g. Butter, Margarine, Oils, Mayonnaise etc.* to :	Add Cream to*:	Add Cheese to*:	Add Skimmed Milk Powder to:
Cereal or Porridge Puddings	Mashed Potatoes	Sauces	Sauces	Milk (See Recipe for Enriched Milk)
Hot Drinks	Toast/Bread	Mashed Potatoes	Pasta Dishes/Pizza	Porridge
Milkshakes/ Smoothies	Sauces	Soups	Soups	Mashed potato
		Puddings	Scrambled Egg/Omelette	Sauces
		Pastry and Cakes	Mashed Potatoes	Custard
		Cereal or Porridge	Beans on Toast	Milk Puddings
		Milkshakes/ Smoothies		Creamy Soups
				Milkshakes



Enriched Milk

Add up to 4 tablespoons of dried milk powder to 1 pint of full cream milk. This can be used wherever milk is being used and is useful when someone is not able to eat or drink a larger amount.

Ready Meals, Meal Delivery Services and Online Shopping

You may find that your energy levels change throughout the week and that on some days you feel better than others. To help ensure you are eating as well as possible, as often as possible, make the most of the 'good days' by preparing extra meals which you can store in the fridge/freezer as individual portions for 'bad days'. Alternatively, you may want to buy a selection of ready meals for this purpose. Another option is to make use of companies and services like Meals on Wheels, Wiltshire Farm Foods, or Oakhouse Foods, who all provide a selection of meals which are either ready-to-eat or frozen. Supermarkets such as Asda, Tesco, Waitrose and Sainsbury's also offer online shopping and home delivery services which may make shopping easier for you.

Swallowing Difficulties

If you notice any of the following when eating or drinking you should seek advice from a healthcare professional

such as your GP or Practice Nurse, who can refer you on to specialist speech and language therapist or a dietitian:

- Difficulty swallowing.
- Choking or coughing.
- Bringing food back up, sometimes through your nose.
- A sensation that food is stuck in your throat or chest.
- A change in the sound of your voice whilst/soon after eating i.e. your voice sounds 'wet'.

Eating Environment

- Food and fluid are essential to maintain health; however, the social and psychological aspects of eating and drinking are also important.
- Try to ensure that your dining environment is as pleasant as possible and that meals and snacks are appetising. Eating with others often helps to encourage appetite; you may enjoy dining with family and friends or at lunch clubs. If you tend to eat more slowly than others give yourself plenty of time.

Summary

Malnutrition is a common problem and if unidentified and untreated can lead to serious consequences. The simple steps outlined above should help to identify and treat the condition however, if these simple steps do not seem to help, seek advice from a healthcare professional.

To support the BDA's Campaign against malnutrition and for further information visit:
www.mindthehungergap.com

This Food Factsheet is a public service of The British Dietetic Association (BDA) intended for information only. It is not a substitute for proper medical diagnosis or dietary advice given by a dietitian. If you need to see a dietitian, visit your GP for a referral or: www.freelancedietitians.org for a private dietitian. To check your dietitian is registered check www.hpc-uk.org

This Food Fact Sheet and others are available to download free of charge at www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts

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