

Malnutrition - Overcoming the Problem

This Fact Sheet (adapted from BDA) is intended to support those who are not able to eat enough food to meet their needs.

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

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.

Common signs of malnutrition include:

Weight loss, Tiredness and lethargy, Alterations in mood, Loss of appetite, Disinterest in food and/or fluids, General 'slowing up', e.g. taking a long time to understand & answer questions.

Malnutrition can lead to:

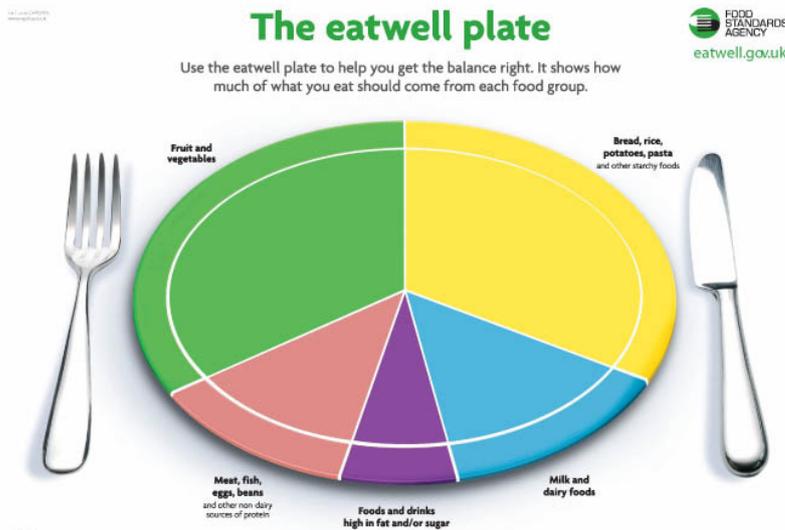
Increased risk of illness & infection, slower wound healing, Low mood, Increased risk of falls, Difficulty keeping warm, Reduced energy levels, Reduced muscle strength, Potential hospital admission.

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).
- 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, cereal, potatoes, pasta, 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.



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



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. 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, 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.

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.

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'. Another option is to make use of companies and services who can provide a selection of meals which are either ready-to-eat or frozen. Supermarkets 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: 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

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.

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Written by Marjory MacLeod and Debbie Provan, Dietitians.

The information sources used to develop this fact sheet are available at www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts

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