

ELDERCARE PROGRAMME

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newsletter



MALNUTRITION IN ELDERLY PEOPLE

This newsletter is for your general information and is not a substitute for medical advice. You should contact your doctor with any questions about your health, treatment or care.

It is important for us to understand where we are at each stage of life and equip ourselves with the necessary tools to be able to enhance our quality of life. Research indicates that as we age, it becomes more important to ensure that we maintain our bodies with the necessary nutrients to prevent a state of **malnutrition**.

What is malnutrition?

Malnutrition occurs when the body does not get sufficient nutrients from the food we eat to work properly. Nutrients include fats, carbohydrates, protein, vitamins and minerals. These substances boost your body's energy level and aid you in ensuring a better state of health. They help your body grow, repair tissues and regulate processes such as breathing and the beating of your heart.

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Causes of malnutrition in the elderly

- Poor appetite due to health-related conditions, such as diabetes
- Adverse effects to treatment
- Psychosocial factors: low or poor income and living in informal settlements
- Food preparation - for example, some foods, like vegetables, do not need to be overcooked, as doing so may destroy its nutrients
- Physical disabilities, which may limit access to shopping centres
- Mental challenges such as forgetfulness (a common condition in the elderly)

Signs and symptoms of malnutrition

- Unexpected weight loss
- Tiredness and lack of energy
- Forgetfulness
- Weak immune system
- Dry skin and brittle nails
- Slow healing of wounds and cuts

Malnutrition interventions

- One should ideally eat at least three meals a day.
- Fresh fruit and vegetables are encouraged to be part of these meals.
- Ensure proper food preparation by washing your hands and ensuring that the area that you are working on is clean. Boiling rather than frying is preferable as it ensures that bacteria is killed and uses less fat.
- Create a weekly eating plan to ensure that you get sufficient nutrition.
- A shopping list is advisable to ensure that nutritional needs are met.
- Drink enough water to prevent dehydration, more so when it is hot. Five to eight glasses of water per day is recommended.
- Exercise usually improves appetite and keeps bones and muscles strong. Start off with a daily 10-minute stroll and then increase your pace as your body adjusts.



You own your health by ensuring that you take good care of your body. Nutrition forms a vital part of one's healthy living. Lack of nutrients in meals is detrimental to your health and wellbeing.

Healthy eating has been demonstrated to give us energy, improve our thinking and regulate the body's temperature. It is always good to know which foods to eat and being able to prepare it well to sustain our healthy living.

Sources

1. Best Practice Advocacy Centre New Zealand
2. British Nutrition Foundation
3. Familydoctor.org
4. Nestle Nutrition Institute
5. News Medical Life Sciences & Medicine
6. World Health Organization (WHO)

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