



CommCare Corporation

Risks, Symptoms & Tips to Avoid Malnutrition

Did you know...

Good nutrition is critical to overall health and well-being — yet many older adults are at risk of inadequate nutrition. Malnutrition is often caused by a combination of physical, social and psychological issues.

Signs can be difficult to spot, but recognizing problems early can help prevent complications later.

Symptoms of Malnutrition

- Weak immune system, which increases risk of infection
- Poor wound healing
- Weight loss
- Muscle weakness, which can lead to falls & fractures
- Easy bruising
- Dental difficulties

Tips to Help Prevent Malnutrition in Older Individuals

- Observe eating habits:
 - Spend time with the individual during meals at home.
 - Find out who buys their groceries.
- Help the individual monitor weight. Observe how clothing fits.
- Look for red flags: poor wound healing, easy bruising, dental difficulties.
- Know the individual's medications. Many affect appetite, digestion & nutrient absorption.
- Engage doctors to identify & address contributing factors, such as:
 - Suspending diet restrictions
 - Working with dentist to treat oral pain
 - Request nutrition screenings or ask for nutritional supplements
- Encourage foods packed with nutrients. Spread nut butters on toast or crackers, fresh fruits, raw veggies. Sprinkle finely chopped nuts or wheat germ on yogurt, fruit or cereals. Add extra egg whites to scrambled eggs & encourage use of whole milk. Add cheese to sandwiches, vegetables, soups, rice & noodles.
- Kick it up a notch! Add lemon juice, herbs or spices to bland food.
- Plan between-meal snacks. A piece of fruit or cheese, a spoonful of peanut butter or a fruit smoothie can provide nutrients & calories.
- Make meals social events. Drop by at mealtime or invite the individual to your home for meals. Encourage programs where they may eat with others.
- Encourage regular physical activity – even light – to stimulate appetite.
- Provide food-savings tips like shopping lists, coupons, off-brands
- Consider outside help like an aide or Meals On Wheels

Source: Mayo Clinic

Malnutrition Risk Factors:

- Swallowing disorders caused by stroke, Parkinson's or dementia
- Difficulty with mobility or motor skills required to eat
- Decreased appetite or trouble eating caused by dementia or dental issues
- Chronic illness
- Certain medications
- Recent hospitalization
- Diminished sense of taste or smell
- Restricted diets
- Limited social contact
- Limited income
- Depression
- Alcoholism that substitutes for meals or interferes with absorption of nutrients