

I-CARE: SPOT THE SIGNS OF MALNUTRITION EARLY AND TAKE ACTION

Malnutrition - what is it and who does it affect?

Malnutrition, or undernutrition, is a serious condition that occurs when a person's diet does not contain enough nutrients.¹ **It is more common than you think, affecting approximately 3 million people at any one time - nearly 5% of the population.**²

Malnutrition matters

People who are malnourished are more likely to visit their GP more frequently and to end up in hospital.³ Malnutrition affects every system in the body and the consequences are far reaching; they include:⁴

- **A reduced ability to fight infection**
- **Poor wound healing**
- **Inactivity and loss of muscle strength**
- **Increased risk of falls**
- **And in very severe cases, potentially even death**

The good news is that once people are aware of the problem, often simple measures to increase food intake, with or without nutritional supplements, may be enough to reverse the downward cycle and get people back on their feet.⁴

Approximately
1 in 10
people aged over 65
is malnourished
in the UK³

Recognising the problem is the most important first step - so think I-CARE and ask yourself these simple questions about someone you care for.

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I will check:

CLOTHING

- Has their clothing recently started to look / feel loose?
- Do they need to tighten their belt to stop their trousers / skirt dropping down?
- Do they look thin?

Weight loss can be a sign of malnutrition.

APPETITE

- Has their appetite decreased over the last few months?
- At mealtimes, do they often have a drink instead of eating food?
- Do they often feel full very quickly?
- Do they often have difficulty eating or chewing food?

A reduced appetite can be a sign of malnutrition. In addition, when people lose weight, their dentures may also become loose and ill-fitting making it difficult for them to chew food.

RINGS

- Does their jewellery e.g. wedding ring look too big/ loose?

Jewellery can often become loose after weight loss, particularly jewellery they have been wearing for a long time.

ENERGY

- Do they look/ feel more tired and have less energy than the last time you saw them?
- Do they struggle to keep up in a way they never used to?

With reduced food intake, a poor appetite and weight loss can also come a lack of energy.

If you've answered yes to any of these questions and you think someone you care for is at risk of malnutrition, you should contact their GP. They can check for signs of malnourishment and for any conditions that may cause malnutrition and offer appropriate advice and treatment.

For more Information on malnutrition, visit the NHS website

References

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3. Malnutrition Task Force, 2017: State of the Nation: <https://www.malnutritiontaskforce.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-09/State%20of%20the%20Nation.pdf> Accessed June 2020.
4. BAPEN, 2018: <https://www.bapen.org.uk/malnutrition-undernutrition/introduction-to-malnutrition> Accessed June 2020.

UK-N/A-2000100 Date of preparation: June 2020

