



Malnutrition.

Losing weight as we age may be common, but it is not normal

Malnutrition may happen when a person is unable to meet their protein and/or energy needs. Older people may be more vulnerable to this if they:

- are eating less
- have increased nutrition needs
- are less able to absorb nutrients from foods.

What does malnutrition look like?

It is not possible to tell if someone is malnourished just by looking at them. It is possible to have malnutrition in any body shape. Malnutrition can affect:

- body shape, size and composition (weight loss, muscle loss)
- the ability to move
- the ability to think clearly
- how the body recovers from illness or injury.

A screening tool can help to identify if a person is at risk of malnutrition. See the 'Malnutrition Screening Tool (MST)' factsheet for more information.

What causes malnutrition?

There are many reasons why an older person may eat less, including:

- poor appetite
- limited access to food
- cost of food
- social isolation or loneliness
- limited cooking skills



- difficulty cooking (eg carrying heavy saucepans, opening packets or using sharp knives)
- difficulty feeding themselves (eg using a knife and fork)
- problems chewing or swallowing
- reduced taste or smell
- less mobile (eg trouble standing for periods of time).

Nutrient needs


There are other causes of malnutrition.

- Increased nutrient needs – for example a pressure ulcer or wound may increase the need for zinc, vitamin A, C and E.
- The body is less able to absorb, make, or use some nutrients with age. This means older people need more nutrients.
- The use of medication can reduce absorption or increase losses of some nutrients.

How to support someone with malnutrition

- Use a screening tool to identify if someone is at risk of malnutrition. See the 'Malnutrition Screening Tool (MST)' factsheet.
- Ask the 'Nutrition risk identification questions' to identify what may be contributing to them eating less than usual.
- Refer to these factsheets for more information:
 - High energy and high protein foods
 - High energy and high protein drinks
 - I've lost my appetite
 - Nausea and vomiting
 - What to eat when your mouth is sore
 - Taste and smell changes.
- Recommend follow-up with their GP and/or Accredited Practising Dietitian.

Healthy Ageing Tasmania

 health.tas.gov.au/healthyageing
 community.nutrition@health.tas.gov.au

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Visit the Department of Health website (www.health.gov.au) for more information.*

